



BEHIND HIM, WITH LOWERED HEAD THUNDERED THE BULL.

Comrades in New Mexico.

COMRADES IN NEW MEXICO

OR

THE ROUND-UP

BY

RALPH VICTOR

AUTHOR OF "THE COMRADES SERIES," "THE LURE OF THE WILD," "SOUTH SEA ISLAND STORIES," ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

S. SCHNEIDER

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FOREWORD

On Board the R. V. Off Fire Island, July 20, 1908.

My Dear Boys: So numerous are the letters received from my young readers, asking for further particulars concerning the lives and experiences of Chot, Fleet and Tom, that I have decided to yield to the many requests, and to tell those interested something of their school day work and play. The tale of "Comrades on a Voyage" will therefore be deferred, and after their summer outing in New Mexico, ending with the almost tragic venture on the Great Divide, I propose telling of the school life of the boys at Winton Hall, of their sports on the well-known Oval and of the affair, of which some have doubtless already heard, while with the Winton Hall Cadets. I am the more pleased to undertake this task, because of the opportunity it affords, to tell my interested readers of a most mysterious occurrence in the life of Tom Pratt. An episode that was not only to test his character and tax his ingenuities, but which had a marked influence upon the lives and future of all three of the Comrades.

Very truly yours,

RALPH VICTOR.



COMRADES IN NEW MEXICO

CHAPTER I

AT THE BLACK DOG

"Well, boys," said Major Benson, drawing rein in front of the Perro Negro, a small Mexican Inn almost on the border line in southwestern New Mexico. "We will put up here for the night."

"I guess it will be 'put up,'" muttered Tom Pratt, glancing at his chums with a look of comical dismay.

It was a beautiful evening near the end of June. The intense heat that had marked the day had lessened as the sun had gone down, and a refreshing breeze was blowing from the mountains in the west. The comrades, with the exception of a few hours' rest during the hottest part of the day, had been in the saddle since the early morning. But stiff and tired from their long ride as the three

boys were and though pleased at the prospect of resting their aching muscles, the Inn did not appear inviting.

A squat, misshapen one story building it was. Constructed of rough boards, almost square, with a low pitched roof, it still presented a not altogether unpicturesque appearance. It was set in a grove of cottonwood trees, near the bank of a small stream. The wind and the weather had mellowed the barrenness of its unpainted sides to a silvery gray and toned its glaring rawness to something of harmony with the little collections of adobe huts about it. The place was known as the aldea or village of Estrada.

A motley group of cowpunchers, vaqueros, herdsmen and miners, who lounged in the open space under the trees, or stood before the bar, added to the attractiveness of the place.

"Buena tardes, caballeros! Good evening, gentlemen," called the major pleasantly to the bystanders.

"Buena tardes, señor!" responded two or three but the majority, ignoring his greeting, commented audibly upon the new arrivals, speaking in a patois of broken English and Spanish.

The three comrades, Chot Dunham, Fleet Kenby

and Tom Pratt, in the quest of new experiences were spending their summer vacation at the Hacienda de Rosado in New Mexico. They had ridden that day from the ranch, located some thirty-five miles to the north, in company with the major, to spend a few days at his ranch, Red Oaks, and incidently to equip his place with a wireless telegraph apparatus.

"We shall have to look after the horses ourselves," said the major, dismounting and leading the way to the sheds at the back of the Inn. "It is a custom of the country."

"Did you see him?" whispered Chot to Tom, while they were unsaddling their mounts, first glancing around to make sure there was no one within hearing.

"Don't guess I know whether I did or not," replied Tom. "Who is 'him'?"

"That tall fellow in the Mexican dress who was standing in the doorway when we rode up," responded Chot still in a low tone.

"Didn't notice him particularly," said Tom, unconsciously dropping his voice as well. "They all looked alike to me. What about the one you refer to?"

"He is one of the bandits that was after us in

the cave," answered Chot, referring to an experience of the previous weeks.

"You don't mean it!" cried Tom excitedly.
"Which one of them?"

"Miguel," said Chot.

"Gracious!" ejaculated Tom. "I wonder what he is doing here?"

"I wish I knew," responded Chot. "But then I suppose they go everywhere."

"Do you think they know us?" mused Tom.

"Isn't a doubt about that," said Chot. "I heard him say to the man who was with him, 'Them's the fellows Took is always growling about!'"

"Newt Took is undoubtedly one of the outlaw crowd and he would like to get rid of us if he could to pay off past scores," commented Tom. "We will have to be on our guard. Do you think they know that we were the ones that they were hunting for in the cave?"

"Don't hardly think so," replied Chot. "You know they didn't see us and they are not really sure that there was any one there."

"Wonder what they think because of their lantern," laughed Tom.

"What are you two whispering about?" broke in Fleet, who having finished caring for his horse now joined them. "If you fellows didn't talk so much you would get through sooner."

"Shs!" whispered Chot. "Not so loud. There are some of the bandits here."

"Sure you aren't dreaming?" doubted Fleet.
"Where are they?"

"In the Inn," answered Chot.

"Must belong to the inn-er circle," commented Fleet.

"We had better tell the major," continued Chot, laughing. The gentleman referred to was a retired English army officer, now living in New Mexico. He had been arranging for a supply of fodder for the horses and now joined the comrades.

"Well, boys," he said, "what new experiences are you planning now?"

"Not any," replied Chot, "but there are some of the Valdes band at the Inn."

"Very likely," admitted the major, evidently not surprised. "Birds of a feather, you know. Shouldn't wonder, don't you know, if half the natives around here were part of it. But how do you know which are bandits?"

"Tom and I saw them in the cave when we were caught by the earthquake, you know something about it, do you not?"

"To be sure," said the major. "Mr. Shelton was telling me of some of your experiences. Your club seems to have been a success from the start."

"Well, we certainly have had a few incidents out of the usual and worth recording," laughed Tom. "It was not so bad on the farm,"

"Rather lively in New York," suggested Chot.

"And it hasn't been so slow that you would fall asleep on the ranch," supplemented Fleet.

The reader, interested in the chums and not familiar with their past experiences, will find them recorded in the preceding books of the series, the first is called "Comrades on the Farm," where the boys had their first summer outing in each other's companionship. Then follows "Comrades in New York," and "On a Ranch." The latter has reference to incidents which transpired during a short period just prior to the opening of this story.

"What had we better do?" asked Tom, glancing toward the Inn.

"We will go in and get something to eat," suggested the major. "There isn't any need to pay any attention to the bandits. Only be careful not to let them pick a quarrel with you if they should try to do so."

"We will look out for that," replied Chot, with

his usual confidence. He was not boastful, but had that strong physical and mental courage that made him afraid of no one and of no thing.

"And now," continued the major, "suppose we go inside and take a look around. There is one thing in favor of these Mexican Inns, their cooking isn't half bad — when you get used to it."

"If it doesn't kill you before you get used to it," put in Tom.

"It isn't a touch to what you will come across in your life's wanderings," said the major. "I fancy you will eat many a worse meal than you will get here. That is, before you have quenched your thirst for experiences."

"Speaking of thirst, reminds me of water. I would like a chance to wash my face and hands," declared Chot.

"Have to use the pump," exclaimed the major.
"You are out in the desert, you know."

Taking turns now at pumping, the comrades had a good wash up, and were able to take a more cheerful view of the surroundings.

"This reminds me of the cowboy I heard of the other day," remarked Tom when he had completed his toilet.

"How is that?" asked Fleet.

"He had been out on the mesa for a day and a half without anything to drink," said Tom, "and coming to a hacienda he spurred his horse and dashed furiously into the place. Rushing into the house he seized a bottle of furniture polish, which was the first thing he saw, and drank it down."

"'But couldn't you get any water?' he was asked."

"'When a man's dying of thirst,' he said, 'he doesn't stop to think about personal cleanliness.'"

CHAPTER II

A NIGHT ALARM

The comrades found the interior of the Black Dog, as the Inn was called, as little inviting as the exterior. Economy of work and of material was the keynote of its construction; no more was used of either than was necessary to fit it for its purpose. The rough board partitions that divided the inside of the box-like building, were scarcely more than six feet in height; the space above them being open from one end of the building to the other.

This, though doubtless excellent for ventilating purposes, was not conducive to privacy, and the talk and noise of the bar room was audible in the farthest corner of the structure. The principal apartment, the front, which took almost half of the house, was the bar and sitting room, and in addition to the counter which ran down one side, it contained a half dozen tables and several gambling layouts.

Back of this room was the dining room. This as suited to the demands of the patrons of the hostelry, to whom eating was a secondary matter to the quenching of thirst, was much smaller than the front room. At one side of the dining room was the kitchen, and from its vicinity there were issuing savory odors that seemed to confirm the major's opinion as to the merits of the Inn's cuisine.

Back of the dining room again were several smaller rooms, one or two of which contained bunks for the benefit of such unfortunate travelers as might be compelled at night to avail themselves of the Inn's hospitality.

"I suppose people who live hereabouts do not know what a first-class hotel is like?" queried Chot.

"They are satisfied," answered the major, "and anyway 'first-class' is a relative term. What one person approves of, another may not, and then there is the question of cost to be reckoned with. Even here they have varying prices, although I do not know that they distinguish them as we do in old England, by 'class.'"

"You always have three classes, do you not, in railroad traveling?" questioned Tom.

"Yes," replied the major, "and that reminds

me of an old stage that carried people from my home town to another town in the neighborhood. The stage belonged to an old fellow named Carmody, who, taking his cue, I presume, from the railroads, sold places for the trip as first, second and third class but he had only the one stage drawn by two rather ancient specimens of horse flesh. The seats allotted to each passenger were practically the same except that those of the first class sat nearest the driver, etc. A traveler paying first class and taking the trip for the first time would be apt to think, naturally, that he was being imposed upon.

"However, the explanation came in due time. Midway between the terminals was a long, very steep hill to be surmounted. When the base of this hill had been reached, old Carmody would call out:

"'All first-class passengers keep their seats. All second-class passengers get out and walk. All third-class passengers get out and push."

The chums expressed their appreciation of the story by a hearty laugh, and noting a movement of the other guests of the house toward the diningroom, they, nothing loath, made their way to the table to which they were assigned.

The comrades found the dinner they were served with really excellent in its way, and they enjoyed the novelty of the genuine Mexican cooking.

When they had finished their meal they passed through the front room, glancing about them curiously as they went. It had become quite dark by this time, but the room was brilliant with the light shed by a number of oil lamps which hung upon the walls. Around the tables the vaqueros and cowpunchers were gathered, some staking their money on the turn of the wheel or the coming of the black or red, some in watching the play of the others.

The players were mostly silent except for an occasional expletive as they won or lost, but the lookers on kept up a continuous chatter of comment or advice. So intent were they on the games that they apparently paid no attention to the comrades as they made their way out.

- "Did you see them," asked Chot when they were outside.
- "Big as life," replied Tom, "but they seemed to be more interested in their game than in us."
- "Hope they were," said Chot, "but I am a little suspicious of them."

It was so much pleasanter in the open air under

the light of the stars than in the Inn, that the boys remained outside talking with the major until it was time to get to bed. They were tired, and besides they were to be off again early the next morning.

The bandits were still intent on their game and gave the comrades when they went in, no apparent heed.

It was some time before the boys could get to sleep; the calling of the dealers, the muttered exclamations of the players and the loud talk of the men in the barroom coming plainly to their ears, but they were exhausted by their ride and dropped to sleep after a time in spite of the disturbance.

All sound had ceased and the place was in darkness when Tom awoke with a sudden start. How long he had been asleep nor what it was that had awakened him he could not determine, but he was lying in his bunk perfectly wide awake with every sense on the alert.

"Must have heard some noise," he concluded after listening for a while and was about dropping off to sleep again when he felt, rather than saw or heard, something move beside him and the next moment a hand was lightly passed over his face. He was about to call out when something was pressed tightly across his mouth and a voice hissed in his ear:

"If you make any noise I will kill you!"

"Help! Help!" cried Tom in spite of the warning, struggling desperately against the effort to keep him down.

"What is it?" shouted the major, bounding from his bunk.

"What is the matter?" called Chot, tumbling onto the floor, quickly followed by Fleet.

"This way! quick!" halloed Tom, who was still struggling with his assailant.

"Where are you, Tom?" called Chot, endeavoring to make his way through the darkness.

By this time all the inmates of the house had been aroused by the commotion.

"Diabolo!" shouted the landlord from his apartment. "From what comes all this disturbance?"

"Bring lights!" commanded the major, "and be quick about it, too."

It was a full half minute, however, before the landlord with a lamp and a somewhat dishevelled appearance, emerged from an inner room.

"What is it?" he demanded, wrathfully.

"I'm blest if I know," said the major. "What was it, Tom?"

"Somebody had hold of me and threw me on the floor," answered Tom, getting up from the floor where he had been lying, half dazed.

"Pah!" exclaimed the landlord, in disgust.
"Pesadilla!"

"That must have been it," said the major, laughing. "There isn't anything here."

"What kind of a thing is that?" asked Tom.

"Pesadilla—a nightmare," replied the major.

"Your dinner was too much for you."

"Pretty substantial nightmare," asserted Tom. Then struck by a sudden thought he made a dive for his clothes and running his hand in the pockets he added, "the night horse has carried off my pocketbook."

"What is that?" demanded the major, sharply.
"Robbers in the house here! What is this place,
a den of thieves?"

"My pocketbook is gone too," Chot, prompted to make search, so reported.

"You will see that they are returned," sternly said the major to the landlord.

"But no, señor," expostulated the latter with a

shrug of his shoulders, "it might happen to any one."

"It is your place to see that it doesn't happen here," protested the major. "And more than that," he continued, "I want you to see that those pocketbooks are returned. Quien sabe?"

"Nothing at all, señor," demurred the landlord unimpressed.

"Very well," declared the major with a decision of manner that was evidently convincing. "Do you wish me to inform the sheriff that you harbor bandits here in your house?"

"But, señor, no. For the love of heaven, no!" pleaded the landlord. "I will do what I can," he added with a deprecatory motion of his hands.

"See that you do," said the major sternly. "You can leave the light burning, and see to it that we are not disturbed again to-night. You can go to sleep, now, boys, I will guarantee that we are not bothered further." Then again to the landlord, "If the money is not returned before we are ready to leave in the morning, you will take the consequences."

Though they were silent, it was some time before the comrades fell asleep again, and it seemed to them they had scarcely done so when it was time to get up.

When they had risen and began dressing, they found on the floor, near the door, their pocket-books, with their contents undisturbed.

"Did we dream it, or were they really taken?" asked Chot.

"It is wisdom sometimes not to ask awkward questions," the major smiled.

CHAPTER III

'A STRANGE RACE

In spite of the interruptions of the night the boys were ready at daybreak to resume their journey. Travel is far more pleasant in the early hours of the morning, than at any other time of the day. After an early breakfast at which no one but the major and the boys appeared, the outlaws, if they were still about, not showing themselves, they were quickly on the road.

"How far is it to Red Oaks from here?" asked Chot when they started from the Inn.

"About thirty miles," replied the major, "but the road is good and we should get there by ten o'clock."

"Is that as the fly crows?" went on Chot.

"No, no," interjected Tom. "You mean as the flow cries."

"Do I?" said Chot, with a laugh. "You can have it that way if you like it better."

- "You mean as the cry flows," said Fleet.
- "Well, not as the crow flies," the major interposed, putting an end to the discussion. "We follow the trail because it is better traveling. This trail runs south from Estrada all the way down to the Mexican line."
 - "Doesn't it go near any other place," asked Tom.
- "Oh, yes," said the major, "it takes in its course all the towns and villages on the way. It dates back to the time when the Spaniards held this country."
 - "Is there much travel on it now?" asked Fleet.
- "Not so much as there used to be before the railroad came in," said the major. "Now it is used mostly by the herdsmen and the cowboys, but at one time it was the main road between old and New Mexico."
 - "Why does it end at Estrada?" went on Tom.
- "Because the mesa begins there," explained the major, "and there isn't any trail on the mesa."
- "Is it a desert around Red Oaks like it is at Rosado?" said Chot.
- "No, we are leaving the plains now," explained the major. "We are getting on higher ground. We get more rain here and we have woods and more vegetation."

The road was good and putting their horses at a canter the travelers made rapid progress.

"Do you think the bandits took our pocketbooks?" questioned Tom, recurring to their adventure of the previous night.

"Why, who else would do it?" asked Chot.

"Then the landlord must be in with them," argued Fleet.

"Nothing more likely," said the major. "I took the chances on it."

"And that is why they came back," concluded Tom.

"My title of major of course affords me no official position, but someway the people hereabouts do not seem to care to pick a quarrel with me."

The major was a man of fine appearance, and a military bearing that was likely to command respect. That his word should have weight was a condition the comrades could easily understand.

"What is that noise?" asked Chot, a little later. He was riding in front, and they were passing through a small woods. On either side of the trail the ground was thickly overgrown with underbrush. "Sounds as if someone was trying to force their way through the bushes."

"It isn't a horse," said the major, coming to a

stop to listen. "Horses don't thrash and trample around like that. I have heard it for some little time, but I haven't been able to make out what it is."

"It seems to be over there," interposed Fleet, indicating a point a little in front of them.

"Sounds like some big animal trying to break through," said Tom. "Do you have any grizzly bears around here, major?"

"May have some in the mountains, but they are mostly farther north," answered the major. "It isn't a bear. Clumsy as they may seem to be, they don't make any such noise as that."

"Perhaps it's a panther," suggested Fleet.

"Panthers are stealthy animals," put in Chot.

"They don't thrash around like that. They are more likely to be up a tree."

"Don't they ever come down from their perches?" asked Fleet, sarcastically.

"Sounds more like an elephant than anything else," interposed the major. "I have heard them in the woods in India make just such a crashing sound as that."

"Aren't any loose elephants around here, are there?" asked Tom.

"Never heard of any," replied the major. "But

the horses don't act as if there were any wild animals about. They would be sure to scent danger if there were any."

"It is coming this way, whatever it is!" exclaimed Fleet. "The noise is getting louder."

"I see it!" cried Tom, standing up in his stirrups and looking off over the underbrush. "It's a big bull!"

"A wild bull!" exclaimed the major. They are savage beasts when aroused, and dangerous too. When you have an opportunity, note the sharp points on his horns and the small, keen-edged feet. They will attack a man or almost any animal. All of forest life seem to be their enemy, and in seeming resentment for the attacks made on their young, they in turn look upon all beast-kind as their foe. We had better give this fellow a wide berth. I had rather meet almost anything than a mad bull in a place like this. Ride back to the open ground where we will have a chance to get out of his way."

"Perhaps we can ride ahead or him and escape that way," suggested Fleet.

"Let's try it!" cried the impetuous Chot, putting spurs to his horse and dashing ahead.

The other boys, nothing loth, followed suit, and soon had the satisfaction of finding that they were

past the point where the bull was breaking his way through. The riders were only just in time, for as Fleet, who was last, passed the spot, the bull, a magnificent animal with a pair of wide spreading horns, burst into the trail and there stood with head erect muttering a prolonged rumbling bellow as if challenging the world to combat. Now catching sight of the comrades and their mounts, he lowered his head and charged upon them.

"Hurry up!" cried Chot, looking over his shoulder, putting spurs to his horse, and dashing away in a panic. "He is coming this way."

Fleet and Tom, who had drawn rein and had been watching the bull in admiration, with a shout, set off after Chot in a wild race for the open ground, which was soon reached. The major had branched off from the trail and had taken a circuitous path which would shortly bring him again into the regular route. The bull pursued the boys but a little way and then as if satisfied with having put his foes to flight, stopped and turned as if to go back over the trail.

When the bull stopped, Fleet, who had felt his saddle slipping, jumped from his horse to tighten the girth. He had drawn it up and was just about to mount his horse when the bull with a sudden

access of rage, gave vent to another angry roar and again came galloping up the trail. At the sound of the bull's coming, Skyrocket, Fleet's mount, who had been snorting uneasily, now in a paroxysm of terror, sprang ahead suddenly, leaving Fleet alone in the path of the maddened animal.

With a startled glance in the direction of the bull, Fleet started up the trail as fast as he could run, with the beast in pursuit, and closing up rapidly the intervening space.

While this was happening, Tom and Chot, supposing Fleet was just behind them, had ridden on. It was not until his riderless horse came galloping past them that they became aware of his peril.

"Hallo!" cried Tom, when he saw the horse without a rider. "Something has happened to Fleet!"

"We must go back and help him," shouted Chot, turning his mount about and starting off at a gallop.

"Where are you going?" shouted the major, who was about to rejoin the boys and who was not aware that Fleet was not with them. His view had been hid by a clump of trees and thick undergrowth and he was mystified at finding the riders faced in the opposite direction.

"Something has happened to Fleet," replied Chot, "and I am going back to help him."

"What are you going to do?" cried Tom, as they raced along until they quickly came in sight of Fleet pursued by the angry bull.

"Try and attract his attention and give Fleet a chance to get away," shouted Chot.

"Shake your hat or your handkerchief at him," yelled the major, still at some distance. "If he chases you perhaps I can get a shot at him," drawing his revolver. "It is a long shot and Fleet is right in the way but it is the best we can do," he mused. "I will wait until he gets a little closer, however."

"Hurrah! Here comes help," shouted Tom, waving his hat as two cowboys, who had been chasing the bull, broke through the bushes. "Go it, Fleet, you'll beat him yet!"

It was the strangest and most exciting race which the riders had ever seen. In spite of their anxiety to aid their comrade, they were held almost spellbound by the closeness of the double contests. Racing down the road toward them, running easily and lightly but with a speed he perhaps had never attained before in any of the races in which he had taken part, came Fleet, and behind him, with lowered head, uttering from time to time a low, muttering bellow, thundered the bull, visibly lessening, even as they looked, the distance between the two. It was a question of moments only when Fleet would be caught and tossed high in the air, gored to death mayhap, by the wide spreading, cruelly pointed horns.

Tearing along behind the maddened animal came the cowboys, their ponies seeming to fly over the ground, with their lassos swung ready to throw as soon as they should be close enough to their quarry. Which would win? Would the bull have time to overtake and toss Fleet to one side, before the cowboys had caught him, or would the cowboys throw him before he had caught up with Fleet?

It was but a question of moments, of the fraction of a second. The bull was sweeping his head still lower, ready for the climax; the cowboys were whirling their lassos for the throw.

"Thank heaven, they are gaining on him," cried Chot. "Run! Fleet! Run! A few feet more and you are safe!"

"Thunder!" groaned Tom. "He is down."

Putting on an extra spurt in response to Chot's call, Fleet, almost winded, had stumbled and gone down just in front of the charging bull.

"Take care!" warned the major, dashing forward with his revolver ready to fire, when just in the nick of time a lasso fell across the brute's head, whirling him around and throwing him heavily to the ground, scarce three feet from where Fleet had fallen. In fact, the boy had gained that little space by rolling over as he fell.

"Phew!" exclaimed Fleet, getting upon his feet, where he stood panting for a few moments. "I bet that would break the record for the three hundred yard dash."

CHAPTER IV

RED OAKS

"You sure can run some, son," said one of the cowboys who had jumped to the ground and had taken a turn with his rope about a small tree.

"It was a case of had to," replied Fleet. Then recalling the speaker's voice and looking at his rescuer. "Why, its Curly."

"Sure, son, it be," responded the cowboy, and the others coming up, congratulations were exchanged.

"So you boys are acquainted with Curly, are you?" asked the major.

"Sure enough," broke in Chot. "Guess Curly has kinder evened up for the hold-up trick, eh, Fleet?"

"Right you are," assented the breathless boy.

Answering the major's queries Chot recounted the tale of the comrades' arrival at the ranch, and the part Curly played therein. After a time, again referring to his race with the bull, Fleet was prompted to say:—"I was like the farmer's boy looking for woodchuck."

- "How was that?" asked the major.
- "A man going along the road," answered Fleet, "met a farmer's boy with a spade.
- "'Where are you going with a spade?' asked the man.
 - "' Going after a ground hog,' replied the boy.
 - "'Do you think you can get one?' said the man.
- "'Don't think anything about it,' answered the boy. "'The minister is coming to dinner to-day and there is no meat in the house. Got to get him!'"
- "I fancy he got him," the major laughingly commented.

The cowboys had, meantime, gotten the animal under control; each of them had a lasso about its horns and they were ready to start. By riding at some distance on each side of the animal it could be so controlled as to prevent any further effort to break away.

- "Whose bull is it?" asked the major.
- "Belongs to Bar X," replied Curly. "The Wilde ranch. About a half dozen miles east of here," he explained to the comrades. "Got on the rampage

this morning and struck out for freedom and a clear field."

"Came pretty near being a dead bull," said the major, "if you had not come up when you did."

"Reckon that's what it means anyway," commented Curly—"but we will return him to his quarters. Then with a chorus of "good-byes" they rode off.

As soon as Fleet's horse was caught the comrades resumed their journey and preceding without further incident arrived in due course at Red Oaks. Here they received a hearty English welcome from Mrs. Wharton, the major's widowed sister, and her daughter Nellie, a girl aged about fourteen.

"This is my 'cow girl,'" said the major, in introducing Nellie to the chums. "She can ride, shoot and throw a lasso as good as any cowpuncher on the place, which isn't half bad for an English lass."

"But I'm not English," retorted Nellie quickly.

"I'm just as good an American as any of them."

"I suppose we are all Americans now," said the major with a half-sigh. "But there is one thing you can't do, young lady."

"What is that?" questioned Nellie.

"You can't run as fast as our friend Fleet here."

- "Can you run very fast?" asked Nellie, turning to Fleet.
- "I guess I can when I have to," admitted Fleet, laughing.
- "He can give a jack rabbit odds," said the major, relating the incident of the race.
- "Why didn't you shoot him?" exclaimed Nellie, before he had finished.
 - "Shoot who?" asked the major.
 - "Why, the bull, of course."
 - "I didn't get a chance," retorted the major.
 - "I wish I had been there," said Nellie.
- "No doubt," replied the major, dryly. "You would have managed it just right."
- "Well, it does seem as if something could have been done," was the response, and it did not make any of them feel very heroic to be thus commented on by a girl.

The comrades spent the afternoon in going about the ranch in company with Nellie or the major. They showed them all there was of interest about the place, which was as much like an English farm as it was possible to be, the major being wealthy enough to indulge in his hobby. The house, although built of adobe, had been modeled upon the plan of the major's English house at Red

Oaks in Essex, after which it had been named.

"I want to show you my horse," said Nellie, when they were going through a field where a number of animals were pastured.

"Which is he?" asked Chot.

"Wait until I call him," answered Nellie.

Putting a small whistle to her lips, she blew a long note. As she did this, one of the horses, a handsome black, raised his head and looked toward them, then as she repeated the call he came trotting to meet her.

- "Isn't he a beauty?" said Nellie proudly, patting the horse's head as he laid it upon her shoulder. "We raised him from a colt."
 - "I should say he was," admitted Fleet.
 - "Splendid," added Chot.
- "Can't anything beat him around here," Nellie asserted.
 - "Skyrocket can go some," declared Fleet.
- "We shall have to have a race. What is his name?" enquired Tom.
 - "Raven," replied Nellie.
- "Wings against powder!" remarked Fleet. "When shall it be?"
 - "To-morrow," proposed Nellie.

There were other things to think of on the mor-

row, however, and the race when it did come off was long remembered in that section.

"That will do, old fellow," said Nellie, giving the horse a final pat. "I won't want you to-day."

But the steed thus dismissed still followed them as far as the fence, where he stood looking after them as if he would like to continue in their company.

CHAPTER V

NOT CHARGED

"Well, boys," said the major the following morning, when he came upon the comrades standing on the lawn in front of the house engaged in an earnest discussion. "What is on hand for today?"

"We were just talking about the best place to put up the transmitter," replied Chot. "Where would you rather have it?"

"Oh, put it anywhere you like," returned the major. "You know best about it."

"We have to put up the pole the first thing," explained Tom. "Do you want it inside or out?"

"I thought it had to go on the outside," replied the major. "I suppose that depends a good deal upon how big it is. Which goes to show how little a man knows about a thing he don't know anything about. Where is it?" "The pole?" asked Tom. "Oh, we haven't got it yet. The size depends upon where you are going to put it, on the top of the house or outside."

"Isn't the top of the house outside of it?" inquired Nellie, innocently.

"I must speak by the book, I see," answered Tom, good-naturedly. "You see," he explained, "we can put a small pole on the top of the house or we can set up a bigger one alongside of it."

"I think it would be better on the roof," protested Chot.

"You see I don't know anything about this business and you will have to begin my education in wireless telegraphy with the a b c's."

"There isn't any difference really," explained Chot, "as far as the working is concerned, but if it is on top of the house it cannot be interfered with."

"I see," said the major. "You mean if it is on the outside an enemy could cut our communications. I don't think we will ever be in a state of siege here," he laughed, "but you think it isn't a good plan for your pickets to carry unloaded guns."

"That is it," replied Chot.

"I fancy you are right," the major admitted.

"Nothing like being on the safe side. We will have it on the inside as Tom says."

"We will have to go to the woods and cut a pole," observed Tom.

"I can show you where there are some beautiful straight ones," exclaimed Nellie.

"Poles?" questioned the major.

"Trees," pouted Nellie. "You knew what I meant."

"We know what you said," retorted the major.
"We are speaking by the book to-day."

There was a small woods not far from the house where the boys found some fine straight young trees, one of which they cut down and trimmed into a pole. By the time this was done and the pole, with the attached wires, set in its destined place on the roof, it was noon and the work was left until after dinner and the siesta were over.

"Well!" exclaimed Chot, who was looking over the apparatus preparatory to setting it up when they had gone back to the work. "If this isn't a nice state of things!"

"What is that?" asked Tom.

"Why, these batteries aren't charged," replied Chot.

"Guess you will find them charged in the bill, all right," remarked Fleet.

"That will do, Fleet," said Tom, severely, "or you will find yourself discharged."

"And there is nothing to charge them with," Chot went on.

"That's a pretty how-de-do," said Fleet.

"What are they, mercuric or copper batteries?" asked Tom. "Couldn't we send for some?"

"Mercuric," answered Chot. "No trouble about sending but the getting is another horse of color."

"A horse of another color, you mean," corrected Tom.

"I can call spirits from the vasty deep," quoted Fleet, "but will they come when they are called?"

"Dot vos ein nodder thing, eh!" added Tom.

"Depends upon what kind of spirits they are," answered Chot. "Sometimes they come when you don't call them."

"Like they did in the smuggler's suit case," put in Tom.

"We have plenty at the ranch," went on Chot.

"Spirits?" asked Tom.

"No, mercuric bisulphate."

"That is like the Dutchman's anchor," said

Fleet. "He had a first rate anchor but it was at home when he wanted it."

"We aren't so badly off as he was," laughed Chot.
"We can go and get it and he couldn't."

"Gee!" exclaimed Tom. "I like that. A hundred mile ride for a quarter's worth of bisulphate."

"It might be worse," began Chot, cheerfully.

"Suppose—"

"Suppose nothing," said Tom, firmly. "Your suppositions always make a bad matter worse."

"Anyway you ought not to complain, as I am the one to take the trip," argued Chot.

"I think I ought to go with you," demurred Fleet. "There is safety in numbers."

"Nonsense," answered Chot. "There is nothing to be afraid of."

"Are you going right back?" asked Nellie. "I thought you were going to stay until after the Fourth." The girl had just come upon the roof with a pitcher of lemonade which their kind hostess had sent.

"So we are," answered Chot. "There isn't any need of more than one of us going. I can ride over and come back with Mr. and Mrs. Shelton. They are coming down for the Fourth, you know."

"Better let me go with you," persisted Fleet.

"Oh, one is just as good as two," replied Chot, "and it will save the horses."

"Can't you get it at Buena Vista?" asked Nellie.
"That is only ten miles and we can all go."

"I'm afraid not," said Chot, "and then we would have to go to Rosado afterwards just the same."

"Don't bother about it, boys," said the major, when the matter had been explained to him. "A few days won't make any difference. We are like the Indian, we have got all the time there is, you know. I will send to Kansas City for some."

"Business is business," returned Chot. "We agreed to put up the apparatus and we are going to keep our end of the agreement. We want to strike the iron when the sun shines."

"You mean to strike while the iron is hot," corrected Tom.

"Well, it's hot when the sun shines, isn't it?" asked Chot in a grieved tone.

"Well," continued the major, "like a willful woman, you will have to have your way, I suppose."

"Why a willful woman any more than a man," asked Nellie.

"Because a woman always gets her way, my dear," answered the major.

"Not always," Nellie doubted.

"It ought to be safe enough," said the major, after a thoughtful pause and reverting to Chot's contemplated journey.

"Of course it is safe enough," replied Chot. "I can ride as far as Estrada to-night and I can get an early start the next day and get to Rosada before noon-time. I will have company on the return trip, and doubtless Mr. Shelton will let me have a fresh horse for the journey."

"Look out for the outlaws," advised Fleet.

"I don't think the bandits will bother about me," laughed Chot.

CHAPTER VI

A UNIQUE HIDING PLACE

"WE will ride part of the way with you," suggested Fleet, "and see you safe on the road."

"If you are going," advised the major, "the sooner you get away the better."

"Then I am going to get off at once," announced Chot.

It was but a few moments before the horses were saddled and the little cavalcade started. After accompanying him for some half dozen miles the others bade Chot "adois" and returned to the ranch.

It was still early evening, for the days were now very long, when Chot arrived at El Perro Negro; but unlike the other to be remembered evening there were but few persons about and these few paid no attention to him. After attending to his horse and supper being over, getting something to eat which the landlord found for him, Chot was off early to bed.

The night passed without any disturbance, although he slept, as Fleet would express it, "with one eye awake" and with the coming of daylight he was astir. He fed his horse and gave him a rub down preparatory to an early start.

On his way to the shed that morning, he noticed several men whom he had not before seen. Among them he observed the outlaws Jose and Miguel. He paid no attention to them, however, until they came up beside him. He was engaged in currying his horse.

- "That is a good beast you have there," said Miguel. "Cuanto? How much for him?"
- "Good morning," responded Chot, and continued,
 "He isn't for sale."
 - "Your horse?" went on the man.
 - "No," said Chot, shortly. "He isn't mine."
 - "Where do you come from?" asked Miguel.
- "I came from Major Benson's," said Chot, guardedly, thinking it wise not to speak of Rosado.
- "Isn't that one of Mr. Shelton's horses?" asked Jose.
- "Yes," said Chot. "Do you know the owner?"
 The man muttered something which Chot could not understand.
 - "Then you come from Rosada?" questioned

Jose. This after a pause during which he eyed Chot narrowly.

"I have been stopping there," answered Chot.

"Are you going back there?" asked Miguel.

"I am going to meet Mr. and Mrs. Shelton," replied Chot, getting somewhat uneasy under the insistent questioning.

"That is what I told you," remarked Jose to Miguel, as the men started back to the Inn.

"I wonder what it was he told him?" mused Chot. "The best thing I can do is to get away from here as quickly as possible."

As soon as Chot could get his breakfast he was off on his way, having seen nothing more of the bandits.

From Estrada a good part of the journey was along the course of a stream that came down from the mountains and as the road was good Chot urged his horse on, but in spite of all his efforts the animal lagged; so that when at noon he stopped to rest in a small grove, he was much less than half way to Rosado. The presence of the bandits at the Inn had disquieted him and as soon as the worst of the heat was over he re-saddled his horse to resume his journey.

As he was starting off, as a matter of precaution

he glanced back over the road and was disturbed to see two horsemen rapidly approaching.

"The quicker I can get away from here the better," he thought, and he urged his horse on as fast as he could.

"They may be all right," he reflected, "but I don't like the looks of it and it will be just as well to keep out of their way."

"I wonder what is the matter with Brownie," he cogitated after a bit, for in spite of all his efforts the horse's pace became more labored and slower. His pursuers, if such they were, were rapidly gaining on him.

"They may be after me and they may be only traveling in this direction," he reasoned, "but I am going to find out. I will ride over to the woods; it is out of my way and off the trail; if they follow I'll know they are after me."

Turning his horse's head in the direction of the forest he proceeded as fast as he could. Looking back after a few moments he saw that the men had changed their course and were plainly headed toward and rapidly gaining on him. His position was decidedly unpleasant. The outlaws, he was sure, had recognized him as one of the comrades who were visiting at the hacienda, and of whom

they had heard enough, through Took, to regard as dangerous enemies and to be gotten out of the way. Whether they knew that the comrades had discovered the secret of the lost river or not they were evidently anxious to be rid of them.

"I can't successfully resist them if they attack me," reasoned Chot; "I wish I had brought a gun of some kind. As it is, the only thing I can do is to try and elude them." Chot thought quickly. "If I can jump from the saddle into one of the trees I won't leave any trail and they won't know where I have gone. I'll try it anyhow," he said to himself, "even if I fail I won't be any worse off, for my mount is laboring painfully."

The wood which he was now approaching was of very heavy timber and little underbrush had grown up between the trees. The trees themselves were well scattered, yet were so large their wide spreading branches interlaced and even the lower branches were so high that Chot could not reach them with his extended hand. Climbing now on the saddle he got first on his knees, as he and his chums had practiced in their efforts to imitate the tricks of the cowboys at the hacienda, then onto his feet, where he balanced himself for an instant. While the horse was loping along under his persistent urging

he came to a slightly sagging branch, grasping it he sprang into the tree. Quickly he drew himself up out of sight of any one below.

He had scarcely succeeded in doing this when the bandits, who were only a short distance behind him when he entered the woods, were heard galloping below him.

"We have got him now," he overheard Jose saying to his companion.

"Don't be too sure of that," objected Miguel.

"They are devils, those Americans."

"A fig for your devils," returned Jose. "If I can get my hands on him I will take care of him all right."

"You want to pray the saints they don't get their claws on you," retorted Miguel.

Further words he could not catch as they rode along.

"I wonder what will be the next move," thought Chot as he made his way to better security farther up in the tree. "I think I will study up flying machines when I get out of this. A pair of wings would come in handy just now."

Chot was not long left in doubt, for in ten minutes the men came back through the woods, evidently in search of him.



HE GAZED IN FASCINATED TERROR.



"What did I tell you," expostulated Miguel. "I knew he would get away somehow."

"He hasn't got away yet," growled the other, stopping beneath the tree in which Chot had taken refuge. "He disappeared in the woods somewhere and I am going to find him. He is somewhere between this locality and the edge of the wood where we found his horse. Say, but you did not give him a big enough dose. The animal ought to have played out hours ago."

"So they tried to poison my horse," was Chot's thought.

"I am going to find him," repeated Jose.

"Quiza!" said Miguel, looking about him, "Maybe you will and maybe you won't. If he were human where could he go? There is no place here where he could hide."

"He is here somewhere," retorted Jose, "and I am going to search him out. He knows too much and I am going to get rid of him. He must be up a tree and so he must come down."

"Carambo! no," said Miguel. "Nothing but a cat could go up a tree so quick. We were just behind him. See, there are the marks of his horse's hoofs, the animal never stopped in his stride. The boy went off just like that," and Miguel blew across

his hand with an expressive little puff. "Same as they did in the cave. Better leave him alone. No good will come of it."

Chot, who had climbed up into the tree as high as he dared, now drew himself close to the trunk and waited for the next move on the part of his pursuers, which was not long in coming. He could not see the speakers below, but of a sudden his attention was attracted to an adjoining tree. Chot had noted that the branch upon which he was resting his hands for partial support, was of a remarkable length and stretched out till it met and overlapped a branch of the next nearest tree. Some motion upon the branch of the farther tree caught his eye. To his horror, he made out some sort of a wild beast stealthily approaching. Its yellow eyes were on a level with his own. He gazed in fascinated terror. Truly his predicament was hopeless. There seemed no way for him to cope with one enemy or the other. To remain where he was, would be to become the sure prey of the wild beast. To make any move for defense would call to the attention of the outlaws his hiding place.

CHAPTER VII

THE MAJOR'S STORY.

"I SUPPOSE Chot is at Estrada by this time," said Tom, when in the evening after their return from their ride with Chot they had gathered on the lawn, which, in the English fashion, lay in front of the house.

"Ought to have gotten there some time ago," said the major.

"I have been thinking," suddenly interjected Fleet, who had been sitting silent for some time.

"Such an unusual operation that you have to mention it?" asked Tom. "Don't do too much of it for it might prove dangerous."

"No danger of your overdoing it," retorted Fleet. with the accent on the your.

"What has been disturbing your gray matter now?" continued Tom.

"We could have rigged up some sulphate of cop-

per batteries if Mrs. Wharton would spare us a few jars."

"I can spare a few in the interest of science," laughed Mrs. Wharton.

"But we haven't any more sulphate of copper than we had of mercury," objected Tom.

"We can get that at Buena Vista," said Fleet.

"Every drug store has that. They have a drug store at that place, haven't they?"

"Do you mean a chemist's shop?" asked Nellie.

"I guess that's the English of it," said Fleet.

"I thought somebody was an American," remarked the major dryly.

"I don't care," replied Nellie, "it says chemist on the window anyhow."

"Then there must be one there," said Fleet, "so that settles that part of it."

"Say! why didn't you think of it before," groaned Tom. "Your brain works too slow, it's twenty-four hours behind. The wheels need oiling."

"It's better to work a little slow than not at all," retorted Fleet, but he made no further reference to the matter and the conversation drifted to other subjects.

"It's a good time now," suggested Tom, ad-

dressing the major, "for you to tell us that story you promised at Rosada."

"Did I make a promise?" asked the major. "If I did I shall have to keep it."

After a few moments of silent musing the major commenced his narrative.

"When I was a boy younger by two years than either of you, for I was only fourteen, I accompanied my uncle Fenn on a trip, which lasted a full year, to Borneo.

"My uncle was a naturalist of some renown and he had been appointed by his government to secure specimens of rare birds and animals. We had been much in each other's company, uncle and I, and we were extremely fond of one another. I had profited greatly by his instructions, though his outings were always looked upon in the light of pleasure trips by me.

"Of our interesting experiences in Borneo I will say nothing. Uncle picked up there as a guide and servant, a native who was recommended as one in whom he could have confidence, though he spoke hardly a word of English. He was black as a piece of ebony and uncle dubbed him Bony and always called him by that name.

"Some specimens uncle particularly wanted he

could not chance upon. After a month of effort, every day of which was glorious pleasure to me, uncle was told that only in some of the smaller islands of the adjacent group would his search be likely to meet with success. It was determined therefore to seek out such an island.

"A canoe was secured, and finally every thing was in readiness. Our boxes were snugly stowed, our provisions ready, our guns in their water-proof cases, the sail lay ready for hoisting, and all that was wanted now was to wait until a good wave came in and then shove off and ride out on it as it retired.

"The canoe was so large that I wondered whether we should be able to manage it ourselves; but I had full confidence in my uncle's skill, and it seemed to me that my help ought to be of some use. So I seized the pole that lay ready, and prepared to use it. Bony said something to the little crowd gathered on the sands, when, as he took the lead, eight or nine ran into the water, seized the boat by the sides, and ran her right out fifty yards to where the water was up to their breasts, when, giving us a final thrust, away we went upon the top of a roller, my uncle hoisting the sail at the right moment.

"Bony took the great paddle, steering and showing himself thoroughly skillful in the management of a canoe.

"My uncle pointed east as the course he wanted to go; but our crew, as we called him, rose in mutiny directly, pointing south, and handing the paddle back to me he grew very excited, saying, 'Bird, bird,' flapping his arms like wings and uttering screeches, whistles, and cries, before lifting an imaginary gun to his shoulder and uttering the word 'Bang!'

"'That is plain enough to understand, Dick,' said my uncle.

"'Yes,' I replied; 'he means that there are plenty of parrots and other birds on some island where he will take us.'

"'It does not much matter where we go,' said my uncle, 'so long as we visit islands where naturalists have never been before, so I shall trust to our friend here.' In turns we held the sheet as the swift canoe glided over the sunlit waves till the island we had left began to grow dim in the distance and its mountains to sink, as it were, beneath the wave, while the place to which we were going grew less misty and indistinct.

"It was evidently very high land, and as we drew

nearer we could see that right and left of it there were other islands apparently of goodly size.

"Mid-day came and we made a hearty meal, the canoe, urged by the soft brisk breeze, still gliding onwards till towards evening, when we were sufficiently near the land we approached to make out that it was very bleak and bare and sterile. There was a ridge of mountains in the central portion, but as we examined the place with the glass it looked as blank and uninviting as could be.

"'I'm afraid we have made a mistake; but perhaps one of the other islands may prove more inviting."

"He continued his inspection and went on talking.

"'There are plenty of traces of sea-birds,' he continued, 'but it is not their breeding season, and I cannot see a single bird. But he is not making straight for the sands. Why don't you try to land there?"

"Bony shook his head, and then laughed and said, 'No,' steering the canoe to the left of the island. And so we sailed on till it was so near sunset that it would be dark in half an hour, when our crew, who had evidently been here before, suddenly steered the canoe into a cove well sheltered from the

rollers, and lowering the sail we ran her up on the soft sands quite clear of the sea, Bony at once setting to work collecting dry drift-wood to make a fire.

"He pointed out a sheltered spot among some heaped-up rocks where the sand had been blown up by tempests into a soft bed, and here, after a very hearty meal well cooked over the fire, we lay down to sleep; my uncle having climbed to the top of the rocks and swept the island with his glass, returning to say that there was not a trace of a human being.

"We slept soundly and well out there in that little storm-swept island, but no storms disturbed us, and the first thing I heard after lying down was the crackling of wood as Bony piled it up to make a good fire.

"As soon as he saw me awake he beckoned me to go to the boat, and there, taking the fish we had brought out of the basket, he smelt it, made me do the same, and then threw all but one small silvery fellow into the sea.

"Hullo!" cried my uncle, "isn't that waste?" for he had advanced over the sands unheard.

"'I think so,' I said, 'but I think he means to catch some fresh.'

"That was evidently Bony's intentions, for he cut up the silvery fish into scraps for bait, and then signing to us to help him, we launched the canoe, paddled out half a mile, and then threw over a couple of lines, Bony showing his teeth with delight as he drew in quickly a couple of good-sized mullet-looking fish, a couple more, and another soon coming to my line.

"But Bony was not satisfied till we had caught five or six times as many as seemed necessary. Then and then only did we paddle ashore.

"It was soon evident why Bony had wanted so many fish, for after cleaning and setting enough for our breakfasts to roast, he prepared the rest and put them to cook while we made a hearty meal. Then he put the freshly cooked fish on board, where we followed him and once more launched upon the tropic sea.

"Are you interested, boys?" inquired the major, at this point. "For this is an old story to my sister."

[&]quot;Indeed we are!" exclaimed the others in unison.

[&]quot;Then I will go on," said the major.

CHAPTER VIII

OUT OF SIGHT OF LAND

"It was plain enough that this was only a resting-place upon our way, for as soon as the sail was hoisted Bony took the paddle and steered us southwest, leaving larger islands to right and left though nothing was visible ahead.

"'I suppose we must trust him,' said my uncle; but it does look rather wild work cruising these seas in an open canoe, quite at the mercy of a savage whose language we cannot speak.'

"'But I think he must have been here before,' I replied.

"'Yes,' was the answer, 'he has been here before, and probably has touched at some place where
he has seen, or thinks he has seen, plenty of birds.
'At any rate, if the weather holds fair it will not be
such a very difficult thing to run for some island for
shelter.'

"I had been thinking the same thing, that it seemed a very risky proceeding to sail right out to sea under the guidance of this savage; but there was so much romance and novelty in the idea of sailing away like Columbus in search of a new land, that I thoroughly enjoyed it, and the further we sailed the more excited I grew.

"It was now plain enough why Bony had insisted upon a good supply of fish, for we dined off it and then made our evening meal of the same, no land being in sight, and when at last the lower edge of the sun seemed to touch the crimson water, sending a path of light right to our canoe, whose sail it seemed to turn to ruddy gold, there was still no land in sight.

"My uncle stood up and used the glass, gazing straight before him in the direction that seemed to be our goal; but Bony shook his head and then closed his eyes and made believe to sleep, pointing to us in turn.

"'He wants us to lie down and sleep,' said my uncle, 'but it is out of the question;' and he shook his head.

"Bony tried again and again to get us to lie down, but finding that we would not, he sat there laughing and looking as merry as could be, although there was no land in sight, and at last, when the sun was disappearing, he placed the paddle in my uncle's hand, pointing south-south-west as the course to be steered, after which he lay down and went off fast asleep.

"I sat talking to my uncle and holding the sheet, though the breeze was so steady it seemed to be quite unnecessary, while he steered the canoe onward through the darkness, taking the stars for his compass, till the motion of the boat and the darkness combined to send me off into a deep sleep. I had closed my eyes and started up several times before, but this last time, when I opened my eyes again it was to see the black figure of Bony seated there steering, with the sun just above the horizon, and my uncle stretched in the bottom of the canoe fast asleep. Pointing ahead I tried to learn from our steersman how much farther he was going to take us.

"His reply was to point straight ahead, and we were still speeding on, when, after five or six hours' sleep, my uncle jumped up into wakefulness, ready to partake of the waiting meal of cold fish, biscuits, and fruit; the coffee, which in a case like this I made by means of a spirit-lamp, being kept in abeyance for a time.

""Well, Dick,' he said; 'is our wild-goose chase nearly at an end? Is land in sight?'

"'No, uncle,' I said, after gazing carefully ahead.
"Just then Bony pointed to the telescope, and made signs to my uncle to use it.

"'Look through?' he said to the black. 'All right, my friend, I will;' and placing it to his eye as he stood up in the boat he cried to me as I eagerly watched him, 'Land ahead, and apparently a wooded shore!"

"By the time we had made a hearty meal Bony pointed with triumph to the faint hazy speck in the distance, now growing minute by minute plainer to our eyes. He watched our countenances very intently, and then suddenly broke out with:

"'Bird - shoot bird.'

"'He seems to have brought us here under the impression that it is a good place, and I trust it will prove so,' said my uncle. 'I hope there will be no unpleasant savages to hinder our work.'

"As we drew nearer the glass was frequently brought to bear, but neither my uncle nor I could detect any sign of habitation, not even when we were within a quarter of a mile of the shore. The place proved to be densely wooded in some parts,

while the lofty hills looked green and park-like, with the large trees dotted here and there.

"The beach was a soft white sand, upon which the waves curled gently over; and not twenty yards from the highest marks made by the tide, the tall palms, loaded with fruit, dropped their great feathery leaves.

"As far as we could see the island was not large, but the interior was very mountainous, the green hills running up to a great height, for the most part well-clothed with wood; and to our great delight, as we ran the boat cautiously upon the sand, we could hear the screams of parrots and the whistling and twittering of innumerable birds.

"'We may as well be prepared against danger,' said uncle, loading his gun, and I followed suit; but Bony began to chatter and expostulate with us for leaving the boat, and signed to us to help him run it up on the next wave well ashore, so that a rope could be made fast round the nearest palm stem.

"This we did, and the black's next movement was to collect wood for a fire. To humor him we waited about while he lit the fire, but kept making little incursions amongst the openings to see if we could spy out any signs of human habitation. But look where we would we saw nothing, and it soon became evident that we were the only occupants of that part of the island.

"Bony seemed so satisfied and contented that it was very evident that there was nothing to fear; so we obeyed his signs after we had helped him to make a good fire, and followed him through an open park-like piece of the country till we were about half a mile from the sea, when his object in guiding us was plain enough, for he pointed out a little flock of half a dozen pigeons as big, it seemed to me, as ordinary fowls, and getting within range we fired together, and shot four.

"We secured the birds we had shot, and going back my uncle and I set to and skinned them, handing over the bodies to be cooked while we carefully preserved the skins, admiring them all the while.

"Handsome as was the appearance of the birds, they were none the less delicious in the eating. No doubt our open-air life had a good deal to do with the keen enjoyment we had in eating the birds we shot; but feeding as these pigeons did on spices, nuts, and other sweet food, the flavor given to their flesh was very fine.

"Dinner over, we were for an expedition; but

Bony protested loudly. Taking an axe and beckoning us to follow we accompanied him to a patch
of bamboo, and helped him to cut down a good
selection of stout pieces, and after them a number of lengths of rattan cane, which grew here in a
wonderful way. I had seen it growing before, but
never to such perfection; for it seemed to run up
one tree and down another, running along over the
bushes for a short distance and then ascending another, till uncle computed that some of these canes
were quite a hundred yards long.

"It was very evident what Bony meant, and he was telling us all the time, though not a word could we understand, as we helped him.

"'As we are to make a hut for shelter,' said uncle, 'I suppose he expects us to stay here for some time, which is a good sign, for he evidently knows that there are plenty of specimens to be had.'

"Then we began to carry the bamboos and rattans to the edge of the forest, just beneath a widely spreading tree, in whose branches every now and then some beautiful lory came and perched, but only to fly off screaming. Sharpening four stout bamboos and forcing them into the soft sandy soil for the four corners of the hut, Bony very soon bound as many more to them horizontally about five feet from the ground, tying them in the cleverest way with the cane.

"Then he tied a couple more across at each end, and laid a long stout bamboo in the forks they made for a ridge-pole, binding all as strongly as could be with an ingenious twist, and after that making rafters of smaller bamboos, so that in a couple of hours he had made the rough framework.

"Towards the latter part of the time, in obedience to his instructions, which were given by word of mouth and wave of hand, uncle and I cut a great number of palm leaves of a very large size, with which Bony rapidly thatched the hut, making by the time it was dark a very rough but very efficient shelter, where we lay down to sleep that night upon a pile of soft dry grass, of which there was any quantity naturally made into hay and close at hand.

"We were so tired out that we did not trouble ourselves about there being no sides to the hut, being only too glad to have a roof to keep off the dew, and, trusting to there being no dangerous wild beasts, we lay down and slept soundly till the sun was once more above the sea.

CHAPTER IX

FRESH TREASURES

"Bony set to work earnestly to finish the hut, binding down the palm leaves of the thatch with more long canes, which he cleverly threaded in and out, and afterwards secured their ends. Then he cut off the long ends of the bamboos so as to leave all tidy before commencing the sides.

"My uncle was as anxious as I was to go upon some expedition; but as there was no shelter to be obtained here, and it became more and more evident that we were upon an uninhabited island, he saw the necessity for having our boxes and stores under a roof.

"So we set manfully to work helping the black, cutting bamboos, bringing large palm leaves, fetching long rattan canes, and handing them to him; while, saving when he left off for meals, Bony toiled like a slave, working with an industry that we should not have expected to find in an inhabitant of one of these sleepy isles.

"At last, though, he finished, and his childish delight seemed to know no bounds. He danced and shouted, ran in and out, walked round the hut, and then strutted up to us full of self-satisfaction, his tongue going all the while, and evidently feeling highly delighted at our smiles and words of praise.

"No time was lost in transferring our boxes and stores beneath the roof, and then, as it wanted quite three hours to sunset, my uncle proposed, by way of recompense for all our drudgery, that we should take our guns and see if we could not obtain a few specimens.

"Now Bony led the way to a high hill about a mile away, from whence we had a splendid view all but in one direction, where there lay a clump of mountains. Look which way we would there was nothing but rich plain and dense jungle, with occasional patches of park-like land. Not a sign was there of huts,

"'We are in luck,' said my uncle. 'This island must swarm with natural history specimens, and he has brought us here because he thought it a good place; so now to make the best use of our time. Look out!"

"As he spoke, he raised his gun and fired at a bird darting down a narrow rift between two rocks that looked as if they had been riven asunder.

"I thought he had missed it, but Bony ran ahead and returned directly with a most lovely kingfisher in glorious plumage.

"'If we get nothing more in this island, I shall be satisfied,' said my uncle as we gazed at the lovely creature. 'Now, we must not have a feather of that bird spoiled. I feel ready to go back on purpose to prepare it.'

"It was indeed a lovely creature; but as I gazed upon its delicately beautiful tints I felt puzzled. It was of rich purple on the back, with azure blue shoulders dashed and speckled with a lighter blue, while all the under parts were of a pure white, which seemed to throw out the rich colors of the back. But the great beauty of the specimen was its tail, which was long and had the two center feathers continued almost without any plumes till the end, where they spread out like a couple of racket bats, making the little bird in all about a foot and a half long.

"'Come,' said uncle, 'we must get back to the hut, or we shall never get our birds turned into skins before dark. Look out!' he suddenly called.

"We fired so closely together that it sounded like one shot, and three great pigeons fell heavily to the ground — part of a little flock that was passing over our head.

"Bony seized them with a grin of delight, for he knew that these meant larder, and then hastening back we had just time to strip and prepare our skins before night fell, when work being ended the fire was relit, the kettle boiled, and a sort of teasupper by moonlight, with a dark forest behind and the silvery sea before us, ended a very busy day.

"That night as I lay in the dark, but with the beach outside lit up by the moon, and listened to the strange noises of the forest behind the hut, I felt over and over again ready to awaken my uncle or Bony, so sure was I that I could hear wild beasts on the move.

"Should there be tigers, or leopards, or even wild boars, what chance should we have if they attacked? Or it might be that one of the huge serpents of which I had read so much might creep in at the open door.

"I wanted to be brave, but somehow that night I felt horribly afraid, even the humming buzz of some night-flying beetle making me start. Perhaps I was over excited, or perhaps, as my uncle would

have said, I had eaten too much. At all events, be it what it may, I could not go to sleep, but lay there turning hot and cold and wishing it was morning. The silence seemed so dreadful, and the idea of this being an uninhabited island, instead of being delightful as it had felt in the bright sunshine, now appeared horrible, and I lay thinking of our being far from all human help, and that if our boat happened to drift away we should be left to starve.

"Of course this was all nonsense, for with such a clever savage as Bony and our own ingenuity and tools we could have built another boat — not such a good one as we had arrived in, but quite strong enough to bear us over a calm sea to one or the other of the islands where trading vessels came.

"Then I grew hot and seemed to be dripping with perspiration, and my horror increased. What would become of us when our food and powder and shot were gone? We should starve to death. And I began to tremble and wish I had not come, feeling as if I would give anything to be back at home in my old bedroom, with the gas outside in the road and the policeman's heavy foot to be heard now and then as he went along his beat on the look-out for burglars.

"Then I tried to reason with myself and to think

that even if our powder and shot were gone we could make bows and arrows, and set traps, and as food ran short we could always make fishing-lines and catch the scaly creatures that swarmed amongst the rocks all round the shore. Besides which there were cocoanuts in plenty, with abundance of other fruit.

"I thought too of how when I was at home I should have revelled in the idea of being in such a place, to have an uninhabited island, and such a glorious one, far more beautiful and productive than that of Robinson Crusoe, than whom I should be far better off, for in addition to a man Friday I had my clever uncle for companion, guide, and protector.

"At the thought of the last word I stretched out my hand to awaken him and tell him of my horrible feeling of dread; but I drew it back for very shame, for what was there to be afraid of?

"I grew a little calmer then and lay gazing out of the open door at the brilliant moonlight, which made some leaves glisten as if they were of silver, and all beneath and amidst the thickets look dark and black and soft as velvet.

"Then came a strange sighing noise from the forest behind us, which made my flesh creep as I

wondered what it could be. Then there was a wild, strange cry, and soon after a heavy crash as of something falling.

"After that as I lay bathed in perspiration and oppressed by the terrible feeling of loneliness that seemed to increase, I fancied I heard the pat, pat, pat, pat of some animal running along the ground, followed by a hard breathing.

"That must be a wild beast," I said to myself; and I rose up on one elbow to listen, meaning to get hold of my gun and load it if the sound came nearer.

"Then in a confused and troubled way I began to ask myself whether I ought awaken my uncle and at the same time kick Bony to make him seize his spear and help in our defense.

"But there are no big wild beasts in these islands, my uncle had said to me several times, even expressing his doubt as to there being anything very large in Borneo.

"'But there are great apes,' I said to myself. 'I know there are in Borneo, so why should there not be others in an island like this;' and in imagination I began to picture a hideous, great orangoutang cautiously advancing towards our cabin.

"I knew they could be very fierce and that they

were tremendously strong. Then, too, some travelers had described them as being quite giants of six, seven, and eight feet high, and supposing that there really were no other wild beasts in this island, undoubtedly there were these wild men of the woods, as the Malays called them, and it was one of these that was coming about the hut.

"Of course; I knew now as well as if I had seen it. That crash I had heard was made by one of these monsters, and that was its hard breathing that I could hear now.

"It was of no use that I tried to make myself believe that I was only listening to Bony breathing, and every now and then indulging in a regular snore. No, I would not believe it, and lay with my feeling of horror increasing each moment till I lay so helpless now, that if I had wanted to get my gun I could not, I dared not move.

"Then there was another horror in the shape of a curious lapping noise from the sea, with a splashing and wallowing as of some great beast; and I did know this, that horrible crocodiles came up the rivers and lived about their mouths, going out to sea and back, and though we had seen no river yet in this island, it was evident that this was one of the monsters crawling about on the shore, and I

seemed to see it in the moonlight with its great coarse, scaly back, crooked legs, long stiff tail, and hideous head with sly, cruel-looking eyes, and wide, long, teeth-armed jaws.

CHAPTER X

DELUSIONS

"AFTER a while I knew as well as could be that with its strange instinct it would scent us out and come nearer and nearer, crawling along over the soft sand and leaving a track that could easily be seen the next day. I even seemed to see its footprints with the wide-spread toes, and the long wavy furrow ploughed by its tail.

"It was all one terrible nightmare, growing worse and worse; the noise on the shore increased, the rustling and crashing in the woods; there was a strange humming and buzzing all around, and the breathing sounded closer and deeper.

"At last when I felt as if I could bear it no longer, and that if I did not rouse my uncle we should be destroyed, I tried to call out, but my voice sounded weak and faint; there was a terrible sense of oppression about me, and the humming and singing noise increased.

"I contrived, however, to touch Bony, and he muttered angrily and changed his position, the noise he made in doing so waking my uncle, who started up on one elbow as if to listen.

"'He hears it all then,' I said to myself, and with a wonderful sense of relief I knew that we should be saved.

"Why did I not spring up to help him? you will say.

"Ah! that I could not do, for I lay there perfectly paralyzed with fright and quite speechless, till to my horror I saw in the dim light of the reflected moonbeams my uncle lie down again, when I made a tremendous effort and gasped forth something or another I cannot say what.

"'Hallo!' he exclaimed. 'Anything the matter, boy?' and getting up quickly he struck a match and lit a little wax taper that he always carried in the brass match-box, part of which formed a stick.

"He was kneeling by my side directly and had hold of my hand, when at his touch my senses seemed to come back to me.

"'Quick!—the guns!' I panted; 'wild beasts!—a crocodile, an ape, uncle. I have been hearing them come."

"'Nonsense! my boy,' he said smiling.

- "'No, no; it is no nonsense, uncle. Quick!—
 the guns!'
- "'No, my dear boy, it is nonsense. There are no noxious or dangerous beasts here. You are quite safe from them. You have been dreaming, Dick.'
 - "'I've not been asleep,' I said piteously.
- "'Haven't you, my lad?' he said, with one hand on my brow and the other on my wrist; 'then you have been fancying all these troubles. My boy, you have got a touch of fever. I'm very glad you woke me when you did.'
- "'Fever, uncle?' I gasped, as the horror of my situation increased, and like a flash came the idea of being ill out in that wilderness, away from all human help and comfort; and, ludicrous as it may sound, I forgot all about uncle, and began to think of our family doctor at home.
- "'Yes, my boy, a touch of fever, but we'll soon talk to him, we'll nip him in the bud. A stitch in time saves nine.'
- "He laughed so pleasantly that he seemed to give me courage, but I glanced in a frightened way at the opening as I said that I did not much mind.
- "He saw my glance, and went outside with a cup in his hand, to come back in a few minutes with it full of water from a pool close by.

- "'No wild beasts about, my boy,' he said merrily.
 "'They were only fever phantoms.'
- "'But,' I protested, 'I have not been to sleep, uncle.'
- "'Sign that you are ill, because generally you drop off in an instant and sleep soundly for hours.'
- "'But I'm sure I heard a great ape breathing hard, and it broke off a great branch in the forest.'
- "'And I'm sure that you heard Bony snoring; and as to the branch breaking, you heard, I daresay, a dead one fall. They are always falling in these old forests. We don't notice the noise in the day, when the birds are singing, but in the night everything sounds wonderfully clear.'
- "'But I'm certain I heard a crocodile crawling up out of the sea, and creeping towards the hut.'
- "'And I'm certain you did not, my boy. We have no muddy tidal river here for them to frequent. It was all fever-born, my boy.'
- "All the while he was talking I saw that he was busy getting something ready. First he put a little white powder in a glass, then he poured a few drops of something over it, and filled it up with water, stirring it with a little bit of glass rod before kneeling down by me.
 - "'There,' he said kindly, 'drink that off.'

"'What is it, uncle?' I said, taking the glass with hot and trembling hand.

"'One of the greatest blessings ever discovered for a traveler. It is quinine, fever's deadliest enemy. Down with it at once.'

"The stuff was intensely bitter, but my mouth was so hot and parched, and the water with it so cool and pleasant, that I quite enjoyed it, and drew a deep breath.

"I lay back, feeling more at rest, and satisfied that uncle was right about the beasts, for there was no sound now to trouble me; only the lapping of the water, which seemed to be only the waves now beating softly upon the sand, while the heavy breathing was certainly Bony's, that gentleman never having moved since I touched him.

"It was several days, however, and only after repeated doses of the medicine, that I was finally quite myself again.

"Then we hunted about in the near vicinity of our camp and one day when I was strong and well again we started on a long tramp inland. We secured many specimens of rare birds up till noon time. Then uncle decided to go on more rapidly but to do no more shooting.

"The further we went the more beauties we

found, and we kept on noting down places to visit again where there were palm and other trees full of fruit, which evidently formed the larder of various kinds of beautiful birds. We could have shot enough in that walk to have kept us busy making skins for days, but we kept to the determination my uncle had made, not to shoot any more that day, except once, when the curious hoarse cry of some bird of paradise, answered by others at a distance, tempted us away.

"'Birds of paradise are exceptions,' said my uncle smiling. 'We must get them when we can.'

"I immediately seemed to see the beautiful bird flying amongst the trees, with its lovely buff plumes trailing behind like so much live sunshine, and glancing once at my gun to see that the cartridges were in all right, I crept cautiously on amongst the trees on one side as my uncle made a bit of a curve round in another, so that we had a good many great forest trees between us, whose foliage we carefully watched as we went cautiously on.

"Every now and then, after a silence that made us think that our labor was all in vain, and we were about to give up, the loud harsh cry would come echoing from amongst the trees, and always seeming so near that I thought I must get a shot at the bird in a moment or two, and I bent down and crept on as quietly as I could, till the tree from which the sound seemed to come was reached.

"Then I would stand ready to fire, watching carefully for a shot, peering amongst the boughs, and fancying a dozen times over that I could catch glimpses of the bird amongst the leaves, when as if laughing at me for my pains, the cry would come again from a couple of hundred yards away, and the chase went on.

"I did not shout to my uncle, for by stopping to listen now and then I could hear the rustling of the leaves and twigs as he went on, besides every now and then catching through the dim light a glimpse of his face.

"Once or twice, when a beautiful bird sprang up between us, my heart began to beat more quickly, for I thought that if uncle was tempted to shoot at it he might hit me; but by degrees I grew more confident and walked boldly on, feeling that I had nothing to fear.

"That bird must have led us for miles. Every time we were ready to give up, the hoarse cry rang out again, and we followed once more, feeling sure that sooner or later we must get a shot at it, or at one of the others which kept answering from a distance; but at last I heard a peculiar whistle from where my uncle would be, and I forced my way through the undergrowth and joined him.

"'Dick,' he said, wiping the perspiration from his face, 'that must have been a wild goose instead of a bird of paradise. Have you heard it lately?'

"'No, uncle; not for quite a quarter of an hour.

I think it must have taken a longer flight this time.'

"'Yawk, yawk — wok, wok, wok, wok, wok,' rang out close behind us, and we both fired simultaneously at a faint gleam of what semed to be yellow light as it flitted through the glade, running forward to get beyond the smoke in the hope that we might have hit it.

"But even if we had we should not have been able to find it, for in the eagerness of our pursuit we had come now into one of the densest parts of the forest that we had found, and after wandering on through a faint warm glow caused by the setting sun shining through the tree trunks, a sudden dull grayness had come upon us, followed almost at once by darkness, and we knew that we were lost."

"'I ought to have known better,' said my uncle with an exclamation of impatience. 'I have not the most remote idea where our camp is, and Bony will be expecting us back.'

- "'Oh! never mind, uncle,' I said; 'let's have a try. I daresay we can find the way back.'
- "'My dear boy, it would be sheer folly,' he replied. 'How is it possible? We are tired out now, and it would be only exhausting ourselves for nothing, and getting a touch of fever, to go striving on through the night.'

CHAPTER X1

LOST IN THE THICKET

- "'WHAT are we to do then, uncle?' I asked.
- "'Do, my boy? Do as 'Adam 'did, make ourselves as comfortable as we can beneath a tree. We can do better, for we can cut some wood and leaves to make ourselves a shelter.'
- "'What, build a hut, uncle?' I said in dismay; for I was now beginning to find out how tired I really was.
- "'No; we won't take all that trouble; but what we do we must do quickly. Come along.'
- "I followed him up a slope to where the ground seemed to be a trifle more open and the trees larger, and as we forced our way on my uncle drew his great hunting-knife and chopped down a straight young sapling, which, upon being topped and trimmed, made a ten-foot pole about as thick as my arm was then.

- "This he fixed by resting one end in the fork of a tree and tying the other to a branch about five feet from the ground."
- "'Now, then,' he cried, 'get your big sheathknife to work and clear the ground here. Does it seem dry?"
 - "'Yes, uncle, quite,' I assured him.
- "'Well, then, you chop off plenty of soft twigs and leaves and lay them thickly for a bed, while I make a roof over it."
- "We worked with a will, I for my part finding plenty of tree-ferns, whose fronds did capitally, and uncle soon had laid sloping against the pole a sufficiency of leafy branches to form an ample shelter against the wind and rain should either come."
- "'So far, so good, Dick,' he said; 'now are you very hungry?'
 - "'I'm more tired than hungry,' I said.
- "'Then I think we will light a fire and then have as good a night's rest as we can.'
- "There was no difficulty in getting plenty of dried wood together, and after a few failures this began to blaze merrily, lighting up the leaves of the trees with a rich red glow; and when it was at its

height setting a good many birds flitting about in the strange glow, so that we could have procured more specimens here. But after sitting talking by the fire for some time we crept in under our leafy shed, and it seemed to me that no sooner had I stretched myself out than I fell fast asleep.

"I have no idea how long I had been asleep when all at once I started into wakefulness, feeling that we were in danger.

"I did not know what the danger might be, but that there was something about to happen I was sure.

"It was very dark in our narrow shed, and nearly dark out beyond our feet, only that a faint glow from our fire made one or two tree trunks stand out like dark sentinels just on the other side.

"My uncle was so near that I could have wakened him by just moving one hand, but remembering that other night, I shrank from wakening him without cause.

"I've got another fever fit coming on," I said to myself; but all the same I did not feel so, only startled and timid, and to encourage myself I thought that I must have had a bad dream.

"But no; I could remember no dream. It

seemed as if I had sunk at once into a profound sleep from which I had just wakened fancying that we were in danger.

"Then I lay quite still listening to my uncle's breathing, and thinking how helpless and unprotected we were out in that wild place, not even having Bony with us now.

"But what was there to fear, I asked myself as I recalled my uncle's words, that he was certain there were no wild beasts in such an island as this, and there were no other inhabitants than ourselves.

"Yes, I could think of all this, and it ought to have made me more comfortable; but no, there was still that curious feeling of being in danger, and I felt as certain as if I could see it, that something was coming to attack us.

"Then as I could neither see nor hear anything I began once more to conclude that I must be suffering from another attack of fever, and I lifted my hand to awaken my uncle, so that he might give me some quinine again.

"Then I recollected that the medicine was in one of our boxes right away from where we were, for we were lost in the forest, and it would be impossible to move until the warm sun was up once more. So there I lay till another change came over me,

and I once more felt sure that it was not fever again. I knew it was not, and this time there was no mistake — something was coming through the forest, though what it was I could not tell.

"Should I waken my uncle?

"I raised my hand again and again, but always lowered it once more, so fearful was I of being ridiculed; and then I lay thinking that although uncle had said with such certainty that there were neither inhabitants nor wild beasts, there was plenty of room for either to hide away in these forests; and besides, should there be no regular inhabitants, some might have come by canoe from one or other of the islands. And, yes, I was sure of it, they must have seen our fire, and were creeping up to kill us where we lay.

"This was a very pretty theory; but would not they make some noise as they came, and if so, where was that noise?

"I lay perfectly still with the perspiration oozing out of me and my horror increasing, but still there was no noise.

"Yes, there was—a low rustling sound as of some one creeping through the bushes towards us. There could be no mistaking that sound, it was just the same as I had been hearing all the afternoon

as we crept cautiously on in search of the birds of paradise.

"I listened and tried to pierce the darkness with my eyes, but only just about the embers of the fire was anything visible, where the tree trunks stood all like sentries.

"Then the noise ceased and I was ready to believe that I had made a mistake. No, there it was again, and certainly much nearer.

"Should I wake my uncle, or should I try to be brave enough to deal with the danger myself?

"I was horribly frightened and sadly wanted him to give me his help and counsel; but as I was not sure, in spite of my feelings, that there really was danger, I fought hard with my cowardice and determined to act as seemed best.

"Cautiously reaching out my hand I took hold of my gun, and by pressing my finger on each trigger in turn, I cocked it silently, and raising myself on one elbow waited for the danger to come.

"The sounds stopped several times, but were always resumed, and the more I listened the more certain I felt that some big animal was creeping up with great caution towards the fire, though I felt that that animal might be a man.

"I would have given anything to have been able

to sit up in an easier position; but I could only have done so by making a noise and perhaps waking uncle for nothing. So I remained as I was, watching with eyes and ears upon a strain, the barrel of my gun towards the opening in our leafy shed and well covering the fire, and so minute after minute went by, with the sensation more and more strongly upon me of the near presence of some creature, one which I each moment expected to see cross the faint glow of the fire.

"Then all was still, and though I listened so intently I could hear nothing but my uncle's breathing. So still did everything become that I began to feel less oppression at my chest, and ready to believe that it was all fancy, when suddenly the embers of the fire seemed to have fallen a little together, for the glow grew stronger and there was a faint flicker which made my heart give one great bound.

"For there, between me and the fire, was what appeared to be the monstrous figure of an orangoutang, which had crawled close up to the fire and was looking at it.

"The creature was on all fours and had its back to me, while the darkness of the night prevented me from making it out properly; but it looked to me very large and dark colored, and I had read that the strength of these creatures was enormous.

"It crouched there about five yards from where I lay, and as I wondered whether I had better shoot, I suddenly recollected that both barrels of my gun were loaded wth small shot, and that at such a distance, though the shot would well hang together, they were not certain to make a mortal wound; while the result would be that the monster would be more fierce and terrible than it was before.

"I don't think I was afraid to fire, but I hesitated, and as I waited I felt that there was a possibility of the animal not being aware of our presence, for it was evidently the fire that had attracted it.

"But these hopes came to an end directly, and I raised my gun softly to my shoulder, for the creature seemed about to crawl towards me. This was only for a moment or two though, and then there was a peculiar scratching noise as if the monster was tearing at the bushes, and I could dimly see its great back waving to and fro. Then all at once the scratching ceased, and it seemed to have thrown some twigs and leaves upon the fire, which blazed up, and my gun nearly fell from my hand.

"'Bony!' I shouted; and as my uncle sprang up and we crept out into the ruddy light spread by the burning wood, there was my monster in the shape of our trusty follower, dancing about like mad, and chattering away as he pointed to the fire, then to himself, then to a distance, and seemed to be trying to make us understand that he had seen the fire and tracked us by its light to where we were.

"His delight seemed to know no bounds, for whenever he came to a pause in his performance and stood grinning at us, he broke out again, leaping about, running away, coming back, and shouting and laughing as he slapped himself loudly with his hands. I can compare his conduct to nothing but that of a dog who has just found his master.

"The question now arose what was to be done, and by a good deal of sign-making we asked Bony to lead us back to the camp; but he shook his head and stamped and frowned, and to cut the matter short, threw some more wood on the fire, pushed us both into our leaf tent, lay down across the front, and went to sleep."

"Is that all," sighed Tom, when the major had concluded his story.

"That's all for to-night. It's very late."

The listeners all voted that evening one of the most enjoyable and long to be remembered ones of their lives.

"Too bad Chot was not here to hear you," deplored Tom as they said good night.

CHAPTER XII

M DISCONCERTING MESSAGE

THE following morning the two boys with Nellie rode over to Buena Vista in search of the vitriol with which to charge their temporary batteries and which they found without difficulty at the drug store.

"We will give Chot a surprise," said Fleet.
"We will call him up on the wireless as soon as we get it working."

"And tell him to hurry up with the stuff," agreed Tom. "Say that we are waiting for it."

"There is a bill about the race," interposed Nellie, calling their attention to a handbill displayed on the front of the Plaza Hotel, the main hostelry of the place, and before which a group of cowboys were standing.

"Let's have a look at it," said Fleet, jumping from his horse; an example quickly followed by his companions.

Here is the part they read which specially interested them:—

GRAND RACE!!

July the Fourth, at 3 P. M. Half mile straight away.

Horses to be ridden by young people under 20 years of age.

Start at the Blue Pigeon; Finish at Plaza Hotel. First Prize, Handsome Leather Saddle.

Second Prize, Mexican Bridle.

Entrance now open.

Come in and put down your name.

"What do you think of it?" asked Fleet as he read the bill.

"I have an idea," drawled Tom.

"Brain getting busy?" inquired Fleet solicitously. "Better salt it down for future use."

"What is it?" asked Nellie.

"Why don't you and Fleet enter the race?"

"I wouldn't dare," demurred Nellie.

"Just the chance," went on Tom, "for you and Nellie to settle the question about your horses."

"It isn't a bad idea," agreed Fleet, adding after a moment's pause, "for you," dodging the blow Tom aimed at him. "Why don't you try it yourself?" "Oh, I can't ride like you can," replied Tom, but I wouldn't mind going in to help things along. Let's see who is in it."

Going into the hotel the boys ran down the list of a dozen entries.

"Here you are," said Tom, reading them off. "Señora Yette Mendoza, Señorita Inez Cortinez, Miss Stella Wildes. Do you know any of them?"

"Yes," replied Nellie, "they live on the haciendas near us."

"Here she goes," said Tom, taking up the pen and writing on the sheet of paper, Miss Nellie Wharton, following it with Tom Pratt.

"Oh, no," hesitated Nellie.

"You can't back out now," said Tom, "after getting me into it."

"Why, I didn't," said Nellie, adding doubtfully, "what will uncle say?"

"Fancy that!" said Fleet, with such a fair imitation of the major's tone that Nellie started and looked around as if she expected to see the major.

"That's too bad," exclaimed Nellie laughing, "I almost thought he was here beside me."

"We will take all the blame if there is any," volunteered Tom. "You don't really have to ride if you don't want to, you know." "Really?" said Nellie.

"You haven't put your name down yet, Fleet," admonished Tom.

"That is easily remedied," said Fleet, taking up the pen and writing Philetus Kenby in a scrawl that ran almost across the page. "You want to look out for me, Nellie. I'm after that saddle."

"I hope you will get it," said Nellie generously.

"What do you say for a practice spin," exclaimed Fleet when they had mounted and were on the way home. "I'll beat you both to the bridge," indicating a little bridge spanning a creek about a mile away. "Fair start and no favors."

"All right!" called Tom and Nellie, getting their horses into line.

"Now all ready and when I say go, go," called Tom.

"Go!" he shouted a moment later, and the three horses were off down the road at a headlong gallop.

"Hurrah!" cried Fleet, as his horse drew ahead, "Skyrocket will show you the way!"

"Follow me!" called Nellie, a little later, when Raven sprang ahead with a bound.

It was so evident a fact that Raven was the better horse, that after a brief run Fleet called out a surrender, and both riders drew in their reins, bringing their mounts to an easy trot. They had forgotten Tom, who of course was trailing behind, till of a sudden, as they neared the finish they had named, Tom's horse made a spurt that carried him over the bridge in the lead.

"Keep your eye on me!" drawled Tom.

Getting back to the ranch the boys spent the afternoon in preparing their batteries and setting up the apparatus. It was almost dusk when they had the work completed.

"Now then!" said Tom, when everything was adjusted, "Chot ought to be there by this time. Let her go!"

Fleet pressed the key, the spark flashed from point to point and the call for Rosado was sent vibrating through the air.

"Get any answer?" asked Tom after the call had been repeated a half dozen times.

"No," answered Fleet. "Perhaps it won't work so far."

"Seems to be working all right," continued Tom.
"She is making noise enough for a battle ship."

"No use," said Fleet, "it don't go, or it don't come, which ever you like. We will have to let it go until to-morrow."

"Let us go down and get the major to tell us another story," suggested Tom.

"Well, what's the news?" asked the major when they went out on the lawn.

"Can't get anything," answered Fleet. "It doesn't seem to work."

"Well, no news is good news, they say," responded the major. "Did you ever hear of the wireless telegraphy that they have in Africa?"

"Never did," replied Tom. "What kind is it?"

"It is a drum telegraph," said the major. "I don't know as I can describe it to you, but the natives send messages from one village to another by means of a rolling drum beat. It is wondrously effective, too. They usually send them at night, when it is quiet and the sounds can be heard a long distance. Many a night I have listened to the rhythmical rolling of the drum, telling some news or conveying some warning, and heard the answering beats from some distant village."

"Could you understand it?" asked Fleet.

"Not any more than I could the clicking of the wireless," replied the major, laughing.

"Can they send any messages they want," inquired Tom.

"I suppose they can," said the major, "for when

I was traveling through the country they sent news ahead of our advance so that the natives where we were going knew of our coming and all about us long before we got there. They send it very quickly, too, often hundreds of miles in a single night."

"Which only goes to show," observed Tom, philosophically, "that all new things are old."

Tom and Fleet spent most of the following day going carefully over the apparatus, increasing the number and strength of the batteries, and testing it in every way until they felt that they had done all they could.

"Call him up again," said Tom, at length.

"Chot will think he's the whole thing if we can't make it work without him."

Fleet pressed the key and crash after crash followed as he sent the call "Rosado!" "Rosado!" resounding through the air.

"Get anything," asked Tom, after Fleet had repeated the call again and again.

"No! Yes, it's coming," said Fleet. "Hallo! Who is this?"

"What does it say," interrupted Nellie. "Wait until I call uncle and mamma."

- "Yes, this is Rosado. Who is calling," the instrument clicked.
- "This is Red Oaks," signaled Fleet. "Is that Chot?"
 - "Who are you?" asked Rosado again.
 - "Red Oaks," replied Fleet. "This is Fleet."
- "Hello, Fleet, glad to hear from you. This is Mrs. Shelton. What did you say about Chot?"
- "Isn't Chot!" began Fleet, but the other broke in, "Wait a moment, the Fort is answering."
- "My regards to the Fort," sent Fleet, not heeding the call for delay.
- "Now what were you saying about Chot?" the instrument began again after a little pause.
 - "Isn't he there?" questioned Fleet.
- "Why, no," replied Mrs. Sheldon. "Isn't he with you?"
- "He went back to Rosado for something we wanted," reported Fleet. "Hasn't he got there yet?"
 - "Not yet," was the response.
- "What do you think of it?" asked Fleet to the others.
- "Probably delayed on the road somewhere," said the major. "No occasion to be alarmed."

"Tell him to call us up when he comes," signaled Fleet. "Thank you."

"I hope nothing has happened to him," said Fleet. "What do you think we should do?"

"Nothing yet," said the major. "Give him time. He will likely call you up in a little while."

CHAPTER XIII

A COMBAT

For a considerable interval, the reader's attention was diverted and the interest centered on the major's story. The author, however, has not lost sight of the serious predicament of Chot, whom we were compelled to leave in very fact and literally "up a tree." During those dreadful moments, when the wild beast was creeping, slowly creeping and anon stopping, but always with each motion cutting down the distance between them, Chot seemed, as 'tis said of a drowning man, to live a life time of experiences in a single moment. In review before his mind seemed to pass all of the happenings of the past.

The eyes of the beast seemed to fascinate and hold him powerless to move as a snake might charm its prey. Then he noted a tightening of the animal's claws upon the branch. Was it pre-

paratory to a spring? Anyway he was awake now to a determined resistance. He drew from his pocket his large jack knife. Its great blade he had himself ground to acutest sharpness. At least his enemy should feel the temper of the steel. Perhaps, limited as to activity as he was by his cramped position, his movements hampered, he could even yet make an effective resistance. If he failed, at least it wouldn't be for the want of trying.

He opened the large blade of the knife, and grasped the handle firmly in his left hand. It must be a left handed defense, and he determined that into the blow when delivered, should be put his greatest strength. He even leaned far out toward his adversary, to get a longer sweep of the free arm, clinging the meantime with his right hand to the roughened but firm bark which afforded him an excellent and secure grasp. But now he heard again the voices of the bandits.

"But no," said Jose, from his place beneath the tree, but unseen by Chot, "it is not safe with them around. There is something up," he went on, peering into the tree above him. He had detected a slight rustling sound. "Come down!" he called, "before I put a bullet into you!"

Chot did not know whether he had been discovered or not but determined to risk it. He drew himself as close to the trunk of the tree as he could, but he was most concerned by those glaring eyes of the wild beast steadily advancing toward him.

Drawing his pistol the bandit fired into the tree in the direction of the rustling he had heard. The sound of the report had not died away when there was a snarl, a swaying of the branches above his head, and with a scream of rage, a snarling, snapping bunch of gray fur which seemed all teeth and claws, flashed through the air full upon Jose's shoulders, where it clung, biting and clawing.

"A thousand demons!" yelled Jose in a panic.
"Shoot it! Kill it!"

The bandit's horse had started wildly as the wild animal sprang upon Jose and the latter was thrown to the ground; the beast was still clawing at his neck and head.

"Santa Madre!" shrieked Miguel, his horse dancing wildly about the road while he vainly tried to get a shot at the attacking beast. "I told you they were devils, those Americanoes!"

"Diabolo!" shouted Jose, struggling to his feet.
"Why don't you kill it, it is tearing me to pieces!"
He succeeded now in drawing his knife. He

struck frantically at the vicious beast which, with a final snarl, sprang aside and darted away, followed by a fusillade of bullets.

"What in the world has happened?" wondered Chot, who could hear the noise and cries of pain but could not see anything. "Whatever it is I hope that it won't come back this way. I don't believe the beast saw me at all." Chot was probably right in this conclusion, and taking advantage of the confusion below he now climbed down to a lower branch where he witnessed the conclusion of the battle. Jose, with the blood streaming from his neck where the cat had clawed and bitten him, and with his clothing hanging in tatters, was loudly objurating Miguel for not coming to his rescue.

"Why didn't you kill it?" he demanded.

"Not me," returned Miguel. "You can't hurt them. I have had enough of chasing them. Come away before they kill you!"

"You fool!" cried Jose, savagely, "it was nothing but a big wild cat."

"They can take any shape they like," replied Miguel with conviction. "Now it is a wild cat, in the cave it was a bird. The saints protect us, there is another one." Saying this and striking his spurs into his horse, Miguel galloped away, leaving his

companion to follow, which he did as soon as he had secured his horse.

"It seems to be pretty lively here. Now that they have gone, it ought to be a good time to be thinking about getting away myself."

Making his way slowly down the tree until he could see the spread of the ground, he made out a large gray animal that was leisurely sniffing the space at the foot of the tree. He knew not if it were a fox or a wolf. It had the general appearance of the latter. Its coat was gray and it appeared to be a savage beast. Would he catch sight of Chot, or in some way make out his hiding place? Such were the thoughts that rapidly ran through the mind of the imprisoned boy.

"Anyway," he mused, "it's wise to 'bide a wee' upon my perch."

And now another startling sound filled the air. Looking in the direction from which it came, Chot saw another wild beast, somewhat smaller in size, with fur of a reddish tinge. It was unmistakably a fox, and again resounded its wild yap and defiant cry.

On came the red fox, while his challenge was met with a snarl of defiance. Directly under Chot's tree

the two met, muzzle to muzzle, and stood with teeth bared for the fray they were evidently determined upon.

"I wish Tom and Fleet were here," mused Chot.

"There is room enough for several more on this grand stand and methinks this presages to be an interesting tussle."

No interchange of friendly sniffs or licks was there, no dallying, by way of prelude to the impending battle. The aspects suggested war to the finish. It mattered not, it seemed, who got the first snap; "give and take" was the word and soon their cheeks were scored with gashes.

The strength of the brutes' jaws was terrible. This could be noted by the way the teeth cut to the bone, as well as by the clash and ring when they failed to get home. They were unequally matched, it seemed to Chot, who noted every move, and his sympathies were enlisted in behalf of the smaller and reddish fox.

Besides the gray's greater strength, his height gave him an advantage, whether they fought on all fours or as they mostly did, on their hind feet. The gray had the best of the exchanges and when the fight had lasted what Chot thought must be the better part of an hour, the red began to give way.

"I wish I had a shooting iron of some kind," thought Chot. "I would like to take a hand in the game, in the interest of the under dog."

Doubtless observant of his advantage, the gray tried by his great weight to bear the other down. The red appeared to recognize the untoward conditions and of a sudden, to alter his tactics. With a wild rush and a howl of despair, he forced aside the gray's muzzle and although he missed the shoulder, he fixed his holders deep into his opponent's throat, with a grip like that of a strong trap, that clenches its teeth through what it closes upon.

The enormous strength of the gray's jaws was now of not the slightest avail. He struggled furiously to shake loose from the grip of death, flinging the red against the sharp-edged stones that were scattered about, till he howled between his clenched teeth, with pain. All to no avail, and gradually the gray's struggle grew fainter and fainter and toward the end he ceased to quiver.

At last the red let go his opponent and he lay helpless, black with grim and sweat and stained with blood. No creature could have presented a more broken, bedraggled appearance; in fact, he looked the beaten adversary he was. His great ears lay flat on his broad poll, the muscles of his chest twitched as his sides rose and fell. Then his breathing, for a time quick and distorted, ceased. He was dead.

Chot, clinging in the branches of the tree, had been a fascinated observer and remained motionless for a few moments even after the victor in the combat had taken himself slowly and with painful effort, away.

"Well," thought the philosophical Chot, "I would not have been able an hour or two ago to figure out a satisfactory outcome to my predicament, but someway affairs always adjust themselves rightly in the end. If it were not so I guess the world would have gone to pieces long ago."

After a few moments' delay and a careful survey of the surroundings to make sure that there were no other animals lurking in the bushes to spring upon him, Chot came down from the tree and made his way to a small stream that ran through the woods. He felt the need to satisfy his thirst before looking for his horse and for a means of escape.

Stooping down he took a long drink and was dipping his hands in the water for a wash when he saw on the opposite side of the creek a man sitting on a horse. He was regarding Chot with peculiar interest and had a revolver in his hand.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAPTURED

"Howdy!" said the man. "Got you all right, haven't I?"

"Guess you have," answered Chot, relieved to see that it was not one of the bandits, "if I am the one you are looking for."

"Sure am," said the horseman, with broad western pronunciation of the word sure. "Been looking for you for three days."

"What for?" asked the puzzled Chot, who noted a ring of sincerity in the man's voice.

"Reckon you know all right," said the man.

"Stay where you are!" he added warningly. "I have got the drop on you."

"All right," replied Chot. "I'll wait. I don't know that I am in any hurry."

"Sure not," said the man, urging his horse into the creek and a moment later emerging beside Chot. "Now have you any arms?" asked the cowboy.

"Only these two," replied Chot, raising his arms aloft, "and they are fastened on."

Nevertheless the cowboy carefully felt in Chot's pockets to satisfy himself as to the truthfulness of the reply.

"What do you want with me?" demanded Chot. He saw that the man before him was a good-natured looking young fellow apparently about twenty-five years old.

"To take you back to Montevista," was the reply. "Thought you got clean off, didn't you?"

"You are on the wrong trail, pardner," said Chot. "I am not the man you are looking for."

"Sure not," said the cowboy sarcastically.

"They never are. Better go along peaceable."

"Oh, I won't run away," said Chot. "Rather go with you than not, if I can't find my horse."

"Well, you are a cool one," said the cowboy with admiration.

"Got anything to eat?" asked Chot. "I feel as if I would like something to eat to steady my nerves."

"Sure," said the cowboy, getting down from his horse. "Don't mind taking a snack myself." While saying this he was taking out some crackers

and dried meat from a bag he carried. "'Tain't a sumptuous repast but it's a heap sight better than nothing."

- "We'll at least agree on that point," said Chot.
- "That's sure," was the reply.
- "Now mayn't I tell you who I am?" Noting the suspicious look in his captor's face, Chot quickly added, "I don't want to get away."
 - "Who do you know hereabouts?"
- "No one very near, the Shelton's north of here and the Benson's below," answered Chot.

The cowboy grinned satirically, "couldn't think of someone a little farther away, could you?"

Nothing Chot could say was convincing, nor did the boy very much care. He did succeed in getting permission to follow up the trail of his horse, that is, as far as the edge of the wood. He noted the spot where the animal had changed his gait from a gallop to a walk, and noted too that the hoofprints indicated the direction taken to be toward the Shelton ranch. Possibly the bandits had feared to make a captive of the horse, evidently for some reason they had gone off in an opposite direction, leaving the animal to meet distruction or find shelter as chance should elect.

"Reckon the best place for us to go is Wildes,"

remarked the cowboy thoughtfully. "We can get a square meal there and a hoss."

"That is an inducement," agreed Chot. "Where is it?"

"A few miles to the east of here," said the cowboy.

"How am I going to get there?" asked Chot.

"Reckon you will have to hoof it, son," replied the cowboy. "There ain't no trolley cars running that way."

"All right," responded Chot. "I guess I'm good for that distance. 'Lead on, Macduff!'"

"And dashed be he who first cries, Hold, enough!" finished the cowboy. "Reckon this yere mesa be a right likely kind of a place for witches. Think Shakespeare was ever out here?"

"Hardly," replied Chot, laughing. "Don't think he was a cowpuncher."

It might have been a tiresome journey across the plains to the Wilde ranch, but Chot's captor was in no hurry and he beguiled the way with song and story so that the pedestrian did not notice the distance. The gong was being struck for the evening meal as they came up.

"Sure hit it on time," said the cowboy.

"Why, hello, son!" exclaimed Curly, who was

standing by the corral as they came in. "What are you doing over here, looking for trouble?"

- "Never do that," replied Chot, laughing as they shook hands.
 - "What have you done with your hoss?"
- "Sent him on ahead. He ought to be at Rosada by this time," answered Chot.
- "Buck you off?" enquired Curly, with a grin spreading from ear to ear.
 - "No," replied Chot. "I climbed off."
 - "Went up in the air?" suggested Curly.
- "No, up in a tree," corrected Chot. "You see the bandits were chasing me and as they were coming pretty fast I just got up into a tree, out of the way."
 - "Well, you are a bird," commented Curly.
 - "I certainly wished at one time, that I could fly."
- "Do you know the chap?" interjected Chot's captor, whom Curly had saluted as they came up, but to whom he had not spoken. "I came here to borrow a mount," he continued.
- "Where you going?" asked Curly, turning to the other.
- "Taking this chap down to Buena," replied Chot's captor.
 - "What for?" asked Curly, with interest.

"That's for the court to say," answered the cowboy.

"What has he been doing?" asked the astonished Curly.

"One of the gang that killed old man Velasquez," said Chot's captor.

"Say Tom! you are just plumb 'locoed' for sure," exclaimed Curly, convulsed with laughter, in which Chot heartily joined. "I allus knew you was jest a plumb idgit, but I didn't suppose you was as bad as that. Who's been giving you that steer?"

"Why, what's worrying you?" asked the cowboy, perplexed.

Curly was doubled up with another paroxysm of laughter. When he could control himself sufficiently to speak he said: "Ain't nothing worrying me. But there will soon be something worrying you good and plenty. Who do you think you got there?"

"Kid McColl."

"Oh, shucks!" groaned Curly, "if you ain't the limit."

"What's the matter with you any way?" demanded the cowboy.

"Why that chap is one of the kids what's stopping up to Shelton's," replied Curly. "Met the whole lot of them the other day going down to Benson's place. You've done it for fair."

"Never mind," put in Chot. "He treated me all right. He merely said to come along, and as it didn't make any difference where I went,—if I could get a horse one place was as good as another."

"All right," said Curly, "but it's a joke all the same. Now," he added, "let's go in to feed."

"I guess I'll move on," said the crestfallen cowboy, and move on he would notwithstanding Curly's efforts to have him stay.

"He's a good fellow," explained Curly, "and come to think of it, you do resemble somewhat the young fellow the sheriff and his posse are looking for."

"No harm done," said Chot, "and can I get a horse here?"

"Sure so," said Curly. "Get the whole ranch if you want it. Come along until I interduce you to the owner."

Chot received a cordial welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Wilde. He found that they had come to New Mexico from New York and they were heartily glad to see any one from home, as Mrs. Wilde still

called it. Their daughter Stella, a pretty girl, came in a few moments later.

"It does me good to meet any one from the old state," Mr. Wilde declared, after they had sat down to the bountifully loaded table. "What brings you away out here?"

"Oh, we met Mr. Shelton in New York last winter," answered Chot, "and as we, my chums and I, are always looking for new experiences, we were glad to accept his invitation to come out for a part of the summer."

"You seem to be finding adventures all right," laughed Mr. Wilde, when Chot had concluded the telling of his experiences that day.

"We have had our share," Chot admitted laughingly.

"Your perch in the tree-top seems to have served several purposes," said Mr. Wilde. "It effected your escape from the outlaws, and I have enjoyed listening to your graphic description of the fight of the foxes."

"You must be an awful brave fellow," was the compliment very seriously uttered by Stella, and then she added, "I should have been frightened almost to death, I am sure."

Chot was appreciative, but of course made light of the matter and was prompted to say:

"I saw a peculiar fight a year or two ago. Not such large animals were engaged, but the battle was equally tragic and ferocious."

"Won't you tell us of it?" asked Stella.

"It was a contest between a squirrel and a robin. It took place in a tree back of our home at Morton-ville. The day was a hot one, and perhaps the little culprit who was the aggressor was affected by the heat, anyway it was a fight to the finish and lasted fully an hour."

"Of course the squirrel won?" questioned Stella.

"Wait and see. I was lying on the grass in the shade of a large horse-chestnut. I had been noting the happy antics of Mr. Squirrel for some time. At last I saw him crawl along a branch when, as he approached the tree trunk, Mr. Robin suddenly, and without warning, attacked him. It was evidently a surprise party, and no time was wasted in formalities. The bird simply sailed into the four-footed adversary beak and claw, and for a few seconds the furry victim was one of the most astonished beings I ever saw, but Captain Bushytail had as much spunk as Captain Redbreast. The

moment he recovered from his evident astonishment he returned the blows with all four of his busy little paws. Lightning exchange of passes followed. The robin again and again plunging its beak into the squirrel, and the tiny animal biting constantly at the bird's breast. In a few minutes the winged combatant's shirt front was ruddier than usual, and the animal's glossy gray coat was streaked with scarlet.

"Again and again the opposing forces separated only to resume the contest. How many rounds under a proper version of the Queensboro rules were fought I cannot say. Finally Redbreast pushed Bushytail off the branch and the animal hit the ground with a plunk.

"I gathered in the squirrel, for he was too exhausted to make an effort to escape. I looked him over and found that he had lost an eye, a piece of his nose, and one of his ears. Looking up I could see the robin pluming himself. Observing me he cocked his head jauntily, and then took a firm hold of the branch and burst into a song of triumph."

"I am glad the bird won," said Stella, "still I don't know but what I am just as sorry that the squirrel lost."

"All contests come out right, I suspect," said Mr. Wilde. "However that may be I certainly wish that you and your comrades would come and spend a few days with us, and tell us more of yourselves. Consider this an invitation. I think too, I will have you put in one of those wireless things for me."

"We will be glad to do that, although I was not out looking for an order to-day," laughed Chot.

"That will be fine," said Miss Stella. "If you could only make it a wireless telephone it would just suit mother and I."

"We are working on that now," was Chot's serious reply. "We can talk a little ways now but not far enough yet."

"Oh, I was only joking. Is such a thing possible? That will be splendid indeed," cried the girl. "Remember then to put us down for the first one."

"You shall have it," promised Chot, "but now if you will allow me, I feel that I must be on my way."

Farewells were exchanged with the Wildes and Curly was delegated to pick out a mount for Chot.

"Say, Chot," said Curly, when he started to get the horse with which the one addressed was to resume his journey to Rosada. "I suspect you fellows play ball, don't you?" "A little," replied Chot, cautiously, "and I am very fond of the game. All three of us are, for that matter."

"Thought my observation didn't deceive," Curly went on. "You see we are going to have a game over in the town on the Fourth."

"So I heard," admitted Chot, who, close student of everything he undertook, had full knowledge of all the fine points of the game. It was a subject upon which he was always glad to converse.

"It's the rancheros against the Buena Vistas, and we are mighty anxious to win," communicated Curly.

While the animal selected was being saddled, Chot spoke of some up-to-date features of the game. "Gave him points," Curly said, and concerning which more will be said later on.

Mounted now upon a good horse Chot pushed on for Rosada as rapidly as possible. Arriving there without further incident, he first of all sent to Red Oaks a wireless report of his safety.

His mount with which he had parted when pursued by the outlaws, had not been heard of, but was later located at another ranch. The animal had suffered no permanent harm.

CHAPTER XV

SOME VARIED EXPERIENCES

"Is that a prophecy?" asked Chot, as a considerable party of which he was one drew near to the town of Buena Vista on the morning of the Fourth.

"What is that?" inquired Tom.

"Why, what the band is playing," laughed Chot, humming a strain of the music.

"I guess it is," admitted Tom.

Despite the noise of shouts and laughter, intermingled with the firing of guns and pistols, the tune the band was playing: "There Will be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night," came faintly to their ears.

"Maybe it is the only piece they can play," suggested Fleet.

"Don't shoot the band, they are doing their best," quoted Tom.

Mr. and Mrs. Shelton with their little daughter and Chot had arrived at the ranch the previous 'day and now the comrades, the major, Mrs. Wharton and Nellie had ridden over early from Red Oaks to see and take part in the celebration.

"You are sure just in time," cried Curly, greeting them as they rode into the town. Resplendent in a glowing red sash and carrying a big flag in his hand, together with several other cowboys similarly adorned, he was galloping up and down the one street of the town, bossing the job, as he put it.

"What is going on, just now?" asked Chot.

"The grand procesh is just about to move," replied Curly.

"Going to have a parade?" asked Tom.

"Parade!" exclaimed Curly in disgust. "Thunder! no. This is a grand procession. Couldn't have no proper celebration of the great and glorious Fourth of July without a grand procession."

"Who is going to parade, procesh, I mean," asked Tom laughing.

"Oh, most everybody," said Curly. "First there is the band. You heard the band?"

"Yes," admitted Chot. "We couldn't very well miss it."

"Reckon that's so," Curly confessed. "That's what it's here for. Real good band that, onto the job all right, though their repertoire is some limited.

Hired 'em to play all day from the rising up of the sun to the sitting down thereof and then some more and they are doing it most conscientious. Had a 'Hot Time,' sixteen times already. Reckon they think it's an American hymn. They ain't so much on martial tunes but when it comes to the soft chords for the dance, oh! say, they are just 'it.'"

"I suppose the band is a whole show in itself," remarked Fleet.

"Not by a keg full," replied Curly. "We are going to have a division of leading citizens of the county on horseback. Reckon you'll come in there if we don't corral you with the distinguished guests. Rather shy on them. Ain't got no firemen or military but we got some floats, paregorical. One of 'em's a corker: forty-six of the prettiest girls in the county in a bunch, one for each state and, oh say, New Mexico's a stunner. But you ain't rigged out no proper way for a celebration. I'll fix you out," whirling about his steed and galloping off to return a few moments later with a bunch of flags which he distributed among the party.

"We will form the interested spectators," observed the major.

"Not if the coh't knows itself," declared Curly.

"New Mexico expects every man, and particularly the ladies, to do their duty, or she'll know the reason why. You can fall in right yere!"

"I suppose we will have to obey the voice of duty," said the major.

"There doesn't appear to be any other course," laughed Mr. Shelton.

The band which, by this time had taken its position at the head of the somewhat irregular line, now started off with "I'm Afraid to Go Home in the Dark," to which inspiring air the procession moved off; the major, Mr. Shelton and the comrades forming a file.

"Seems to be pretty nearly everybody we know here," remarked Chot, looking about him.

"Seems to be," coincided Tom. "There is the sheriff over there," waving a greeting to the officer who had a place among the distinguished guests.

"There are the bandits that chased me," went on Chot. "The ones we saw in the cave."

"What are they?" asked Tom, "distinguished guests?"

"Must be leading citizens," concluded Fleet.

"Shall we tell the sheriff about them?" Tom questioned

"Better not, I think," advised Chot. "It would only stir up trouble, and we can look out for ourselves."

"That's right," agreed Fleet. "Never mind the bandits. We are out for fun to-day."

"Ladies and gentlemen!" announced the chairman of the committee, after the parade had moved up and down the street. "The next thing on the programme will be a foot race; one-half mile dash, straight away, for five dollars in gold, donated by the public spirited citizens of the metropolis of Grant County."

"Come along, son," said Curly, reappearing, to Fleet. "I've backed you against the field."

"I'm not in it," demurred Fleet.

"Sure, you are in it," asserted Curly. "Just got to do it. Can't get out of it, no how. Just think of the patriots who fought and bled."

"But I'm not in training," protested Fleet.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Curly. "Didn't I see you practice with the bull for pace maker?"

"Go in, Fleet," urged Chot, laughing. "You can't refuse after that. Besides, you were trained fine at school."

"But this is different," hesitated Fleet. "Any-way, I haven't my running togs."

- "That's easy," urged Curly, "I'll fix you out."
 - "What's the course?" enquired Fleet.
- "Quarter mile track, twice around," was the answer.
- "How many are entered?" asked Fleet, relenting.
- "Ain't more than half a dozen," replied Curly. "You see we cowpunchers ain't much on two legs. There's a greaser over there that's sure some on the skedaddle. We're sure counting on you to hold up the glory of the States."
 - "Pretty poor dependence," objected Fleet.
- "Never know what you can do until you have done it," urged Chot.
- "You mean until you have tried," corrected Tom.
- "Sure!" agreed Curly. "You want to look out for the greaser," he added as they went along. "He'll crowd you into the corner and trip you up if he can."
- "Keep on the outside and let him make the pace, up to the finish," counseled Chot.
- "Oh, Fleet's been there before," broke in Tom, encouragingly.

There were eight contestants lining up at the mark when Fleet, rigged out by Curly, took his

place at the end of the line. They were stalwart, muscular fellows, among whom Fleet looked like a grayhound in a pack of mastiffs.

"Are you all ready?" called the starter. "One! Two! Bang!" snapped the pistol, and the contestants were off down the road. It was but a moment, however, before the Mexican, against whom Curly had warned Fleet, had taken the lead and was running easily in front, Fleet tracking lightly behind.

"Take it easy, Fleet!" coached Chot, from the inside, where he, with Tom, were speeding along.

"Hi! what are you doing!" yelled some of the Mexican onlookers, scowling at Chot. "That don't go!"

"Sure it goes!" shouted Curly, taking up the cry. "Take it easy, Fleet, you'll get there yet."

For the first circuit of the track the racers went on with but slight changes in position, except that the Mexican was slightly increasing his lead over the field, with Fleet holding his own. The pace now was beginning to tell, however, on some of the stouter ones, and they were dropping back. As the race went on, more and more of the runners lost ground, until there was a distance of several yards between the two leaders and the stragglers. The Mexican was still in front, running easily, with Fleet just behind him.

Evidently Fleet was the only one the other runner feared, for he moved from side to side in front of Fleet to prevent him from getting ahead.

"Now, then! Hit it up, Fleet!" called Chot as the contestants made the last turn and neared the finish, where all the onlookers were standing.

"Go it, Fleet," shrilly called the greatly excited Nellie, waving her flag with frantic energy.

Fleet made a spurt that brought him close beside the leader, who changed his course again so as to block him.

"That's the style!" yelled the friendly cowboys, "whoop her up, Fleet."

"Vamos, Pepé!" shouted the Mexicans, encouragingly, to their champion. "Correr! Run! Run!"

The two were a long distance in advance of the others and running almost side by side, with the Mexican slightly ahead and still endeavoring to crowd Fleet to the side.

They were now but a dozen yards from the line with the Mexican still in the lead.

"Pepé, Pepé!" shouted the Mexicans. Pepé wins—"

"Oh, he is beaten!" cried Nellie, almost in tears.

"Look out, Fleet," yelled the major with a roar.
"The bull is coming!"

Dropping back for an instant, and then darting to the outside, Fleet made a spurt that carried him with the swiftness of a bird across the line a fraction of a second ahead of his rival.

"Hurrah!" shouted the cowboys, with a fusillade of pistol shots, as Fleet crossed the line. "Ain't nothing slow about us!" and the band broke in with "There Will be a Hot Time."

"Good boy, Fleet!" exclaimed Curly. "You did us proud!"

"Couldn't have done it better myself," commented Tom, giving Fleet a slap on the back that almost floored him.

The next few hours the comrades passed in looking at the cattle-tying contests and the exhibition of rough riding, which made them feel, as Tom expressed it, "as if we were just starting in the Kindergarten class of the riding school."

CHAPTER XVI

SPORTS

"PLEASE clear the road for the young people's race!" shouted Curly and his aids. They were riding up and down the street, trying to press back the crowd and make an opening for the race, a task which was accomplished with infinite difficulty.

"What do you think about our going into the race?" asked Tom of Fleet.

"Don't think we have any business in there," replied Fleet.

"Come along!" admonished Curly. "We want you. Only riders, girls and boys, under twenty, allowed to compete."

"Thank you," replied Fleet, laughing; "we are not in it, then."

"Nothing but straight away riding," assured Curly, who would not be denied. "Perfectly safe. All you have to do is to sit on your horse and get there."

"That isn't much," drawled Tom, "sometimes."

"We will have to go in on Nellie's account, I suppose," observed Fleet.

"Do you think she wants to ride?" questioned Tom.

"The easiest way to find out is to ask her," suggested Fleet.

"You are fertile in brilliant suggestions," commented Tom. "Suppose you ask her."

"That is soon done," replied Fleet, going over to where Nellie was standing with the major and Mrs. Wharton and Mrs. Shelton. "Are you going to ride in the race, Nellie?"

"I would like to," replied Nellie, "but I don't know what —"

"Of course she is," interposed Miss Wilde who, with her parents, had joined the party. "Isn't she, Mrs. Wharton?"

"I don't think she had better."

"I want her to ride with me," interrupted Miss Wilde, "I feel quite lonesome; the only American girl."

"She is only half an American, you know," said the major with a glance at Nellie. "But she can ride with the best of them. Go in, Nellie, and if you don't come out in the front, I'll never own you for a Britisher again."

"Come along then," called Fleet. "We will do our best to keep you there."

"That's the style, boy," commended the major, "if you weren't a good American you would be a first-rate Englishman."

"I guess it's six of one to half a dozen of the other," replied Fleet, as he and Tom went off with the girls after their horses.

There were not more than a dozen entries for the race, the cowboys apparently preferring more strenuous sport.

"Are you in to win?" asked Tom of Fleet, as they lined up.

"I would like to win, of course," replied Fleet, "but —"

"But what?" echoed Tom.

"I had rather see the girls win," replied Fleet.

"Me, too," agreed Tom. "But say!"

"What now?" asked Fleet.

"Do you see who's here?" observed Tom.

"No. Who?" asked Fleet. "Phew!" he whistled as he glanced about him. "Looks as if we would have our work cut out for us," he com-

mented, as he saw the bandit, Jose, line up among the contestants.

"What are they doing here, do you think?" asked Tom, uneasily.

"The same as we are, I suppose," rejoined Fleet.

"Going to ride in the race, evidently."

"Surely he must be more than twenty. I don't like it," declared Tom, "and I don't trust him."

"What can he do?" asked Fleet.

"I don't know," replied Tom, "but he will bear watching."

"I am not the only one who has brilliant ideas," rejoined Fleet, laughing.

"What are you two talking so earnestly about?" asked Nellie.

"Whether Tom or I shall take the saddle," prevaricated Fleet, smiling.

"You needn't worry about that," laughed Miss Wilde. "I have decided on that for myself."

"Then there is nothing more to be said," remarked Fleet, gallantly.

"All ready!" called the starter. The contestants lined up; the two girls were at the right, then Tom and Fleet, the two comrades, and Jose and another at the left.

"Get back into line, there!" called the starter to Jose, who was a half length in front of the rest.

"I am in line," grumbled the bandit, nevertheless backing his horse.

"One! Two!" called the starter, when he had them in line. The pistol snapped and they were all off in a gallop.

"Keep your eyes open for tricks," called Tom as they started.

"All right," sang Fleet in reply.

Though tame enough to the rough riding of the cowboys, it was a wild gallop that made the boys' hearts beat faster. Excited with the noise and shouting, the horses were tearing along at top speed. They were all closely bunched, all riding nearly neck and neck, first one and then another forging a little ahead. It was anyone's race, but as they came to the last quarter Jose's horse then drew ahead and was easily first at the finish, the two girls with their mounts running neck and neck, following some half dozen lengths behind. The boys, as they later described it, were "out of sight."

But the event was not to end without a controversy that at one time gave indications of a serious outcome.

"I don't think that race was fair," Tom protested to the judges. "I believe that fellow, Jose, is much older than twenty."

"What biting you?" sneered the Mexican.
"You were not in it, anyway."

"No," said Tom, "but I want to see fair play."

"What reason have you for your statement?" asked the sheriff, who was one of the judges.

Tom was embarrassed for a reply and could not but admit to himself that he had made a rash assertion and had made a statement he could not sustain. He stepped up to the sheriff, however, and said a word quietly in his ear.

"Are you sure of that?" asked the officer of the law in a low voice.

"Positive, Mr. Sheriff, Chot and I saw him distinctly. Here is Chot now, ask him."

In a whispered conference Chot not only confirmed Tom's report but mentioned briefly the circumstances concerning his trip to Rosado and the efforts of the outlaws, of whom Jose was one, to capture, perhaps make way with him.

"I don't see that I can do anything without further evidence," mused the sheriff. "I imagine you are right about his age, though," he continued; "anyway, our little talk has caused him to forget his prize. See, he is making off as fast as he can go."

Sure enough, it was as the sheriff said. Jose had been edging away a little till he suddenly turned tail and fled as fast as his horse could carry him. A little further talk and the judges announced their decision. "The leader disqualified for being over the age limit, and the race a tie."

"Run it off!" shouted some. "Draw lots!" called others.

"Settle it any way you like," decided the judges.

"Draw straws for it," suggested Tom.

Which was done, and by "a straw vote," as the major dubbed it, the saddle went to Miss Wilde, and the bridle to Nellie.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BALL GAME

AND now the base ball game enlisted the attention of the assembled company. The comrades were quite surprised to note the efficiency shown by some few of the players, notably the pitchers on both the nines. A half dozen runs were made by each side during the first two innings, thereafter both box men were practically unhitable.

"It's a jolly game," called Chot to Curly, who was playing at first.

"Jolly long and no end in sight," answered the baseman, who was also captain. The full nine innings had been played and the tie unbroken. "Say," he added, quietly, walking up to the spot where the three chums were sitting, "can't we fix up one of those tricks you told me about?"

"Why don't you try?" enquired Chot, briefly detailing to his chums the points referred to. "It's all too new to us," demurred Curly. "I tell you what, in our half of this inning I will be first to bat. I have been hitting their pitcher pretty well. I'll get lame and if I make a hit, have Fleet run for me."

Fleet protested, but after a moment's argument, acceded to the plan proposed.

Sure enough, when the short-stop, by a throw to first, of an infield grounder, retired the third Buena Vista man, Curly, of a sudden, developed a sprained ankle. He was a popular fellow and naturally the supposed accident excited the sympathy of many, the ladies, particularly. He was of course applauded, when he again took his place at the bat, the umpire announcing that Fleet Kenby would run for the injured batsman.

The first ball pitched went wild, but the next two, in the umpire's mind, were fair and it looked to the chums as if their plan was going to fail. The next ball was one just to Curly's liking, and with a sharp resounding crack it flew away toward right field, well out of reach of any of the players.

Fleet, on the instant, was off at a bound. "A sure base hit," was the cry, but Fleet had calculated better, and, speedy runner that he was, he rounded first, made straightway for second, and was safely

there when the ball was returned to the short-stop, then covering second.

"The next batsman is all right," whispered Curly to Chot. "He is just the one to carry forward our little scheme." He was a big, rawboned fellow, and his long fly to right was easily caught, but it was a sacrifice and served its purpose, for Fleet advanced to third.

"Now, Chot, it's up to you," encouraged Curly, as after a whispered word to the umpire, that official announced that "Chot Duncan would bat for Smythe."

Everyone was on tiptoe. What meant this putting in of another outsider? Fleet's presence was explained by Curly's supposed mishap, but the onlookers were mystified by the new move.

Chot, standing at the bat, not even in uniform, looked out of place and ungainly. The first ball pitched to him was far from being a good one and Chot ignored it, but the next was fair. He struck at it but failed to connect and there went up a howl of derision. The opposing side and their advocates were in high glee. The next ball pitched was purposely very wide and Chot made no move. Friends of the cowboy nine breathed a little easier. He would not bite at everything, but astonished

and dumbfounded they were at the next move, or rather failure to move, for a good ball he made no effort to hit and "Strike two," called the umpire.

Every one was watching now in breathless expectancy. The pitcher in the box had a broad grin upon his face. In his estimate of Chot as a batsman, he had reached the conclusion that he had nothing to fear here. He wound up and pitched a purposely very wide ball, intending that the next should be a teasing curve that would tempt the batsman and end the striker's try at the bat.

Chot now signaled Fleet. The critical moment had come. The hit and run trick was on the tapis. Would it work? Chot stood listless, apparently indifferent, his bat just easily held in hand. Now came the ball delivered by the pitcher, and merely by the slightest motion of the bat did Chot interfere with the ball's progress to the catcher's mitt. Just a little to the right of the plate droped the ball to roll a dozen feet toward first base.

Then instantly from an awkward-appearing, listless batsman Chot became the agile runner, jumping away, he was seen streaking it like mad for first. The catcher threw aside his mitt and ran to pick up the ball. Then stepping to one side of the base line, he threw straight and swift to the initial base.

"Batter out," of course, and so called the umpire, but what is happening on the other side of the diamond? Fleet, at the signal from Chot, had stolen along the base line as far as he dared and instantly Chot was off, down Fleet came towards home.

Shouts and cries resounded. The catcher discovered what was going on. The first baseman quickly saw the possible outcome of the trick and fired the ball to his catcher. Too late, though, it was. Tearing down the line came Fleet, ending in a glorious slide to the home plate.

"Safe!" cried the umpire.

"Hurrah! Whoopee, we win!" yelled Curly, jumping about, forgetful entirely of that supposedly sprained ankle.

"Seven to six in favor of the cowboys," announced the umpire.

"Going! Going! Gone!" called Curly. "That was a trick worth while. Three cheers for the kids!" They were given with a will, a demonstration in which the Buena Vista crowd graciously joined.

"Well, boys," said Mr. Shelton, a short time

later, "what do you think about going back? Have you had enough of excitement yet?"

"I think I have had enough experience of one kind and another for one day," admitted Fleet.

"We have tried to do our part in the celebrating, I think," added Tom.

"I don't think anybody will dispute that," laughed the major. "You have been almost as much in evidence to-day as the band; one couldn't ask more than that."

"It will be getting dark soon, and we ought to be on our way," went on Mr. Shelton.

"We are not afraid to go home in the dark if the band is," asserted Tom.

"We are ready whenever you want to go," said Chot.

"The Wildes are going with us," added the major. "It is getting a bit too lively here now."

It had grown quite dark by the time the party had started. The night was hot with a threat of a thunder storm in the air, but the distance to Red Oaks was short and they rode slowly on the way. The fireworks display was beginning in the town as they left and "The rockets' red glare; bombs bursting mid air," made the sky brilliant as the

young people turned, every now and then, to look back at it.

They had gone almost half the distance to the ranch and were near to a woods through which the road ran when Tom, who with Chot, was riding in front, suddenly pulled up his horse with an exclamation.

"What's the matter, Tom?" demanded his side partner.

"I don't know that there is anything," answered Tom, "but I thought I saw a flash of something in the woods."

"What did it look like?" questioned the major, who was just behind and had also stopped his horse, bringing the entire party to a halt.

"It looked like a flash of metal," replied Tom.

"As I thought," commented the major. "Just the place for an ambush."

"An ambush?" questioned Mr. Shelton. "Why, who in the world do you suppose would ambush us?"

"The outlaws might," replied the major, tersely.

"There were doubtless plenty of them at Buena
Vista to-day, and that Jose slipped away when he
thought the sheriff was getting interested."

"Well, this is a nice state of affairs!" declared

Mr. Shelton. "If we can be held up like this on a main traveled road."

"What are you going to do?" asked Chot. "Fight them?"

"If we hadn't the ladies along we might do it," replied Mr. Shelton, "but I think it would be wiser to ride back to the town and wait until morning. We could get accommodations for the ladies at the Plaza. If we tried to fight they would have all the advantage. They could see us when we couldn't see them."

"Are you sure, Tom, there is any one in the woods?" asked Chot.

"The point is well taken," agreed the major.

"We have been acting on an assumption that may have no foundation. A little reconnoitering would be in order."

"Tom and I will ride on ahead," suggested Chot.
"Perhaps we can find out if there is any one there."

"That is the best thing to do, but I will go with you. The others may wait here until we come back. Now keep apart and be careful," advised the major as the three rode off.

They walked their horses slowly toward the wood, watching intently for any movement or noise

that would disclose the presence of anyone in hiding.

"If there is anyone there, I suppose they must have seen us," remarked Chot, as they stopped within a short distance of the edge of the woods.

"What of it?" asked Tom.

"If they hadn't," went on Chot, "one of us might have slipped up on foot to reconnoiter.

"Too late for that now. I can't see or hear anything, can you?" went on Tom. "Guess I must have been mistaken. Hallo!" As Tom spoke there came a flash of lightning which was bright enough to reveal to the boys the figures of at least two men lurking in the shadows of the woods. "They are there, all right, and we are going to have a storm, too, quicker than we expected."

With this there was another glare of light and quickly the roll of thunder was heard. Evidently a storm was soon to break upon them.

Finding that they were discovered and evidently not seeking a fight in the open, with each flash of light now quickly repeated, the outlaws could be seen riding away. "An army of them," said Tom. But in reality not six, if there were so many, the boys concluded on second thought.

The major and the two chums hurried back to their fellow journeyers, reporting the assuring news that the coast was clear. All hurried homeward and were fortunate enough to get under cover just as a torrent of rain began to fall.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN ENCOUNTER WITH A SNAKE

"ANOTHER evening at the major's," cried Fleet.
"What could be better than another story?"

"Nothing," coincided Tom, "if the major be the relator."

"The others may not agree," laughed the major, protestingly.

"Try them out," cried the comrades.

"As you will," acceded the major. "If I must, I must, and I will go on from where I left off the other night."

For Chot's edification, the major first told of the circumstances that had made him the companion of his uncle in a journey to the uninhabited island.

"When I opened my eyes again, after that night of fright, the sea was dancing and sparkling, and the leaves waving gently in the soft warm breeze.

"I said very little to my uncle about my alarm,

feeling sure that he would laugh very heartily at my mistake, but it was upon my mind that it was time I grew to be more manly and brave, and not so ready to be frightened at everything I could not directly understand. It seemed so shocking, too, for I might in my cowardly fear have shot poor Bony, who was one of the best and truest of fellows, and seemed never so happy as when able to do something for me.

"I determined to try hard not to be such a weak coward, but I have often thought since, that if any ordinary man had been placed in the same situation he would have been as nervous as I; for to awake out of a deep sleep in a dark forest in a wild land, where dangerous beasts might be lurking, to hear a peculiar rustling noise, and through the faint light to make out the figure of the black, looking big and indistinct as he crept on all fours, was, to put it as you may, very startling.

"We made our way to camp very easily and I was hungry enough by the time breakfast was ready. Soon after the meal we started out on a tramp and to look for some birds.

"After a walk of an hour or so we came to rather a dense patch of undergrowth. I noticed that the ground beneath was very soft and full of water, evidently from some boggy springs. There was a great deal of cane and tall grass, with water weeds of a most luxuriant growth, and the place felt hot and steamy as we forced our way through, till, as I was going first and parting the waving canes right and left with my gun barrel, I stepped upon what seemed to be a big branch of a rotten tree that had fallen there, when suddenly I felt myself lifted up and jerked back, while at the same moment the canes and grass crashed and swayed, and something seemed to be in violent motion.

"'Is it an earthquake, uncle?' I said, looking aghast at the spot from whence I had been jerked.

"'Yes, Dick, and there it goes. Fire, boy, fire!'

"He took rapid aim a little to the left, where the canes and broad-leaved plants were swaying to and fro in a curious way, just as if, it seemed then, a little pig was rushing through, and following his example I fired in the same direction.

"But our shots seemed to have no effect, and whatever it was dashed off into a thicker part, where it was too swampy to follow even if we had been so disposed.

"'Your earthquake has got away for the present, Dick,' said my uncle. 'Did you see it?'

[&]quot;I admitted that I had not.

- "'But you must have trodden upon it, and it threw you back.'
- "'No, uncle; I trod upon the trunk of a small tree, that was all.'
- "'You trod upon a large serpent, my boy,' he exclaimed.
- "'Ugh!' I ejaculated; and I made a jump back onto more solid ground.
- "'The danger has passed now,' he said smiling at my dread; 'but really I could not have believed such a creature existed on so small an island as this.'
- "'Oh, uncle!' I cried, 'I shall never like to go about again for fear of treading upon another.'
- "'You will soon get over that,' he said, 'and perhaps we may have the luck to shoot the brute. I don't think we did it much mischief this time, though I got a good sight of it as it glided amongst the canes.'
- "'Why, we had no shot in our guns, uncle,' I cried; 'we took them out so as not to knock the sun-birds about too much.'
- "'Of course!' cried my uncle. 'How foolish of me not to remember this!'
- "We had both reloaded now, and then, without heeding a shout from Bony, we stood looking in the

direction taken by the reptile, though now all the luxuriant canes and grasses were quite still.

"'What do you say, Dick?' said my uncle. 'Shall we follow the monster and try and shoot it?'

- ""'It must be forty or fifty feet long, uncle,' I said, feeling a curious creeping sensation run through me.
- "'Forty or fifty nonsenses, my boy!' he said laughing. 'Such serpents as that only exist in books. They rarely exceed twenty feet where they are largest. That fellow would not be fifteen. What do you say will you come?'
- "'Ye-es, uncle,' I said hesitatingly, feeling hot and cold by turns.
 - "'Why,' he said to me quietly, 'you are afraid!'
- "I did not speak for a moment or two, but felt the hot blood flush into my face as I stood there looking him full in the eyes, and unable to withdraw my gaze.
- "'Yes, uncle,' I said at last. 'I did not want to be, but a serpent is such a horrible thing, and I am afraid.'
- "'Yes, it is a horrible monster,' he said quietly. 'I don't like them myself, but if we could kill it —'
- "'I can't help feeling afraid, uncle,' I said, 'but I'm ready to go on now.'

- "'What, to attack it?'
- "'Yes.'
- "'It will be rather dangerous, my boy.'
- "'Yes,' I said. 'I suppose so; but I want to get over being so afraid of things. I'm quite ready now.'
- "I looked to him to come on at once, but he did not move, and stood looking at me for some minutes without speaking.
- "'Then we will go and attack the brute,' he said; 'but it will not go away from that bit of a swamp, so we will wait a few moments. Bony will be along to help us unless he proves to be a worse coward than you.'
- "'He could not be,' I admitted pitifully; and I felt very, very miserable.
- "'Oh! yes, he could be,' said my uncle smiling, and grasping me affectionately by the arm. 'You are a coward, Dick, but you fought with your natural dread, mastered it, and are ready to go and attack that beast. Bony may be a coward and not fight with and master his dread. So you see the difference, my boy.'

"A shout from the black informed us of his approach and as I recalled the task we had undertaken, a curious shiver ran through me. I glanced

in the direction of the swamp where, nearly half a mile away, the reptile lay.

"Bony knew nothing about it as yet, and I hardly conceived how he would be made to understand what we had seen.

"'Do you think he will be ready to help kill the serpent, uncle?' I asked, after waiting for some time to see if he would say anything about the attack.

"'I hardly know,' he replied; 'but we'll soon try him. By the way, use the cartridges with the largest kind of shot, for we must make up for this morning's mistakes. Here, Bony, we've seen a snake,' he said.

"'Nat-mi-boi. Hal-lo, hal-lo, hal-lo!' replied the black man, laughing merrily and showing his white teeth.

"'We shall not get at his understanding like that,' said my uncle quietly; and he sat thinking for a moment. 'I have it,' he cried.

"We generally carried a stout piece of cord with us, ready for any emergency, and this cord, about ten yards long and a little thicker than clothes-line, my uncle now untwisted from his waist, where he had worn it like a belt, and calling Bony's attention to it laid it out upon the ground. Then holding one end he made it wave about and crawl and curve and twine, ending by knotting it up in a heap and laying the end carefully down as if it were a serpent asleep.

"Bony watched the process attentively, at first seriously and then as if delighted, clapping his hands, dancing, and chattering away as if telling my uncle how clever he was.

"'But that does not show him what we want, uncle,' I said.

"' Well, then, you try,' he said.

"I took up the rope, made it undulate a little, and then as Bony looked on I gave it a quick twist and wound it round him, pretending to make the end bite.

"He took to it directly, pretending that the reptile was crushing him, fighting his way free of the folds, picking up his club and attacking it in turn, beating the make-believe head with his club, and finally indulging in a war-dance as he jumped round, dragging the imaginary serpent after him, pretending all the while that it was very heavy, before stooping down to smell it, making a grimace, and then throwing down the rope, which he pretended to bury in the sand.

"'It's all right, Dick. He understands, and has

evidently encountered big snakes. Now then to show him our enemy, for he will fight.'

"My uncle was right, for it was evident that Bony quite understood us and meant fighting, for, sticking his spear in the ground, he made signs to me that I should lend him my hunting-knife, which I at once did, and laughing and chattering away he looked about him a little, and then proceeded to cut down a sapling tree about as thick as his arm, from whose trunk he selected a piece a couple of feet in length and carefully trimmed it into a formidable club with a smooth, small handle, while he left the thick end jagged with the ugly places from which he had cut the branches.

"He was not long in getting it into shape, and no sooner had he satisfied himself with his work that he returned my hunting-knife, making believe that he was horribly afraid lest it should cut off his head, and then proceeded to attack an imaginary serpent that was trying to escape through the bushes. Now he was trying to strike it, now retreating, now making blows at it upon the ground, now in the air, ending by dropping his club and seizing the neck of the creature, which he pretended had coiled round him; now he was down upon one knee, now overthrown and rolling over and over in

a fierce struggle; but at last his acting came to a conclusion by his striking the reptile's head against a tree, kicking off an imaginary coil from his leg, and strutting about proudly to show how he had conquered.

"The most surprising part of the affair was that he did not seem to be in the slightest degree exhausted by his efforts, but picked up his club and began chattering to us, and pointing to the marsh as if asking us to come on."

CHAPTER XIX

A BATTLE WITH FEAR

- "'Well,' said my uncle, 'if he will only fight half as well as that when we encounter the serpent, there ought to be nothing to fear. We ought to master the brute easily.'
- "'Would such a serpent be very strong?' I asked my uncle.
- "'Wonderfully strong,' he said. 'Their muscles are tremendously powerful. See what strength anything of similar form possesses; an eel, for instance.'
- "'Yes,' I said thoughtfully, as I recalled how difficult I had once found it to hold a large one that I had caught. 'Eels are very strong.'
- "'Look here,' said my uncle kindly. 'I don't think we should run any risks in following up this serpent, for one good shot would disable it; but still it may be a little perilous, and it is not just to expect

a boy of your age to face such a danger. You stop back at a distance, and I will send Bony into the marsh to drive it out, while I try to get a shot at it.'

- "'Oh, no!' I protested quickly.
- "'Come now, my boy,' he cried, clapping me on the shoulder. 'You are going because you think I shall consider you cowardly if you stay behind. I tell you truly, I shall not.'
- "'I did feel something of that kind,' I said warmly; 'but that is not all. I want to try and be brave and to master all my cowardly feelings, and this seems such a chance.'
- "He stood looking at me for a few minutes, and then said quietly:
- "'Very well then, you shall come. But be careful with your gun, and do not fire without you have a clear shot. Don't hurry, and mind that Bony is not near. As to the danger,' he said, 'there is very little. The worst thing that could happen would be that the serpent might seize you.'
 - "I could not help a shudder.
 - "'Coil round you?'
- "The shudder felt now was the serpent wrapping me round.
- "'And giving you a severe squeeze,' continued my uncle. 'It is a hundred to one against its teeth

catching you in the face, and it is doubtful whether they would penetrate your clothes, and even if they did you would suffer no worse than from a few thorns, for these constricting reptiles are not poisonous.'

"'It don't sound very nice,' I said, feeling as if my face was showing white through the brown of the sunburns.

"'No, it does not,' he said; 'but now I have told you the worst I may as well say something on the other side. Now the chances are that the brute will try its best to escape, and be shot in the act; and even supposing that it did seize you, which is no more likely than that it should seize Bony or me, we should immediately get hold of it by the neck, and have its head off before it knew where it was.'

"'Yes, uncle, I know you would,' I said with more confidence and a strange thrill of excitement running through me. 'Let me come.'

"'You shall,' he replied; 'and now I'll confess to you, my boy, that I should have felt disappointed if you had held back. Come along, my lad, and I think we shall soon slay this modern dragon.'

"All this time Bony had been looking at us wonderingly; but no sooner did we examine our guns and start forward, than he shouldered his club and went before us towards the piece of marshy ground.

"I walked on by uncle's side with my gun ready, and all the time I kept on wondering what he would have said to me if he had known how nervous I felt.

"The thoughts of what we were approaching seemed to take all the brightness and beauty out of the scene, which was as lovely as could be. Strange birds flew by us, glorious trees were on every side, some of them covered with flowers, while the brilliant greens of various shades made up for the want of color in others. Where we were the land seemed to slope down into a little valley, while farther back there was a ridge clothed to its summit with beautiful vegetation.

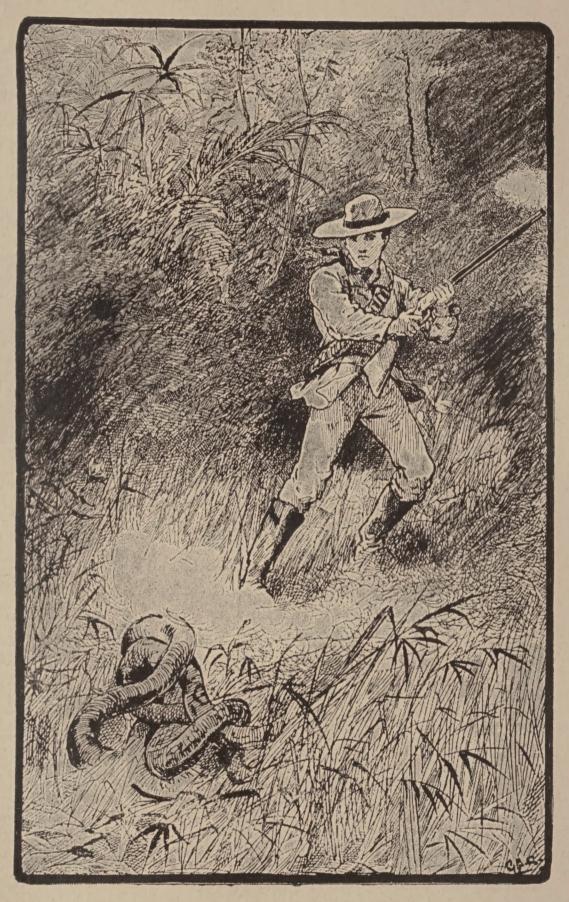
"But just then, as the poetical writer said, the trail of the serpent was over it all, and I kept on seeing imaginary reptiles' heads reared above the beautiful waving canes and grasses, and fancied I detected the rustling noise made by the creature's scales as they glided through the dry stems.

"'Now,' said my uncle, as we stood at last on the edge of the moist depression, 'we must contrive some plan of attack. We must not let the enemy escape, or he will be scaring us all the time we stay.'

"I thought it very kind of him to say us when I

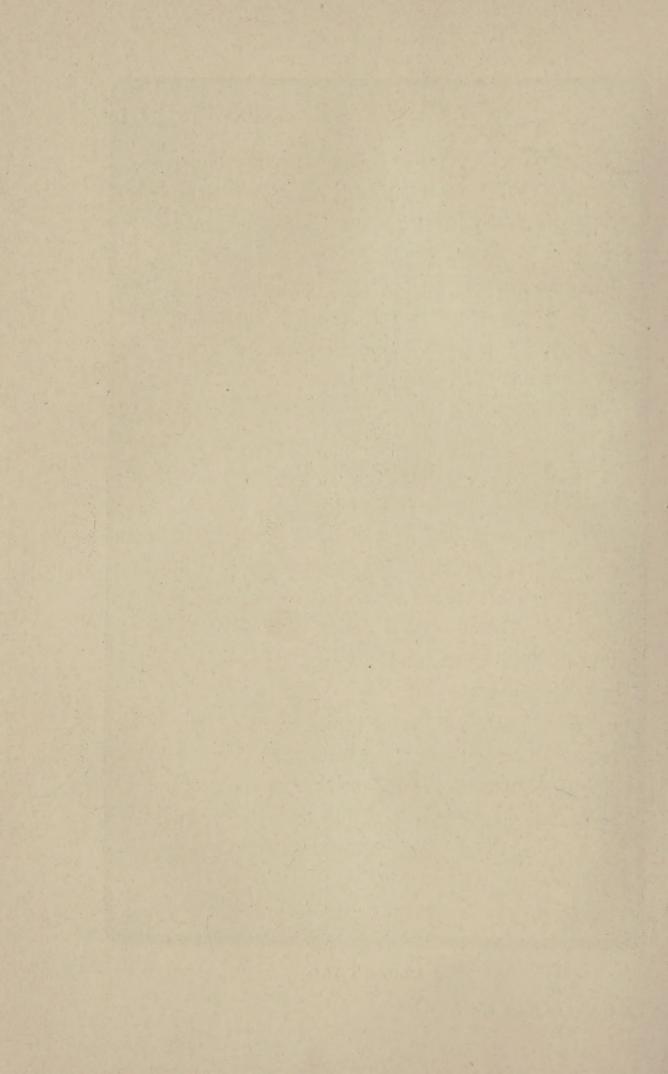
know he meant you, but I did not say anything, only eagerly searched the thickly spread canes and broad-leaved plants as far as I could see with my eyes, and then I could not help thinking what a beautiful spot that marsh was in spite of the serpent, as two or three of the lovely pitta thrushes flitted amidst the bamboos, and half a dozen sunbirds darted about a convolvulus-like plant, and kept flashing in the sunshine, which every now and then seemed to make their feathers blaze.

- "'Now,' said my uncle, 'I think this will be a good place for you, by this trickling rill; you see the place is roughly in the shape of a ham, so you shall have the place of honor, my boy, by the knuckle-bone, while I and Bony go round the fat sides and see if we can find the enemy there.'
- "'Do you think it will come this way, uncle?' I asked.
- "'Yes,' he replied, 'just below you there, so be cool, and give it both your barrels as it goes by. You may depend upon one thing, and that is that the reptile, if it comes down here, will be trying hard to escape. It will not attack you.'
- "I hoped he was right, but could not feel sure, as I remained on the side of the steep slope, at the bottom of which a tiny stream trickled amongst a



A CLOSE CALL.

Comrades in New Mexico.



long patch of luxuriant canes through which I expected the serpent would try to escape to another part of the island.

"The next minute I was quite alone, for, in obedience to my uncle's signs, and eagerly falling into his plans, Bony ran off to get to the back of the little marsh, my uncle also disappearing quietly on my own side, but of course higher up.

"'Perhaps the serpent won't be here after all,' I thought to myself as I stood there in the midst of the profound silence; and I could not keep back the hope within me that this might be the case.

"Everything was now very still, only that once from a distance came the hoarse cry of a bird of paradise and the scream of a parrot, but directly after I seemed to detect the peculiar noise made by a hornbill, one of which birds flapped across the little valley towards a clump of trees.

"Not a sound came from beyond the cane swamp, and the slightest grasses hardly moved, but stood there with their feathery plumes bathed in sunshine, while with strained eyes I counted the knots on every light-brown and cream-colored cane.

"I was watching for a wavy, undulating movement, which I felt sure must follow if the serpent was there and creeping about; but all was perfectly still.

"'It must be farther up to the top of the marsh than he thinks,' I said to myself; and then I heard a cry which made my blood bound through my veins. But there was nothing the matter; it was only Bony on the move, and I heard my uncle answer him. Then there was a beating noise as if the black was thrashing the canes with his club.

"Then my heart seemed to leap to my mouth, for there was rustling in the tall grasses, something seemed to be forcing its way through, and with my gun at my shoulder I was ready to fire at the first glimpse of the scaly skin, but feathers appeared instead, and a couple of large wading-birds flew out.

"The beating went on and bird after bird took flight from its lurking-place, some being very beautiful; but no serpent appeared, and I began to feel more bold.

"Still the beating went on, with Bony shouting from time to time and my uncle answering, till they could not have been more than fifty yards above me, when suddenly the black seemed to change his tone, shouting excitedly to my uncle.

"' They've found it,' I said to myself; and in my

excitement I forgot all about my fears, and stood there with my eyes sweeping the cane growth and my ears strained to their utmost.

"All at once, and so close that the noise made me jump, I heard a shot, followed by a shout from Bony, and a loud crashing noise, as if the canes were being thrashed together with a big stick.

"Bang once more, and then perfect silence, but directly after the thrashing, beating noise began once more, and as I gazed excitedly in that direction I heard my uncle's voice.

"'Look out, Dick,' he cried. 'It's coming your way.'

"'Yolly-to, yolly-to,' cried Bony; but I hardly heard him, for, rushing down amongst the reeds and canes, writhing and bounding in the most extraordinary way, beating, whipping the tall leaves, tying itself up in knots and then throwing itself out nearly straight, came what to me seemed to be a most monstrous serpent.

"I ought to have fired, but as the reptile came towards me I felt as if I must run, and I turned and fled for a dozen yards before shame stopped me, and I faced about.

"The creature was close at hand, writhing horribly, and leaving behind it a beaten track, as in a fit of desperation I raised my gun, took quick aim, and fired, leaped aside to get away from the smoke, and fired again at something close to me.

"The next moment I was knocked down, my gun flying out of my hand, and when I struggled up the serpent was gone.

"'Hurt, Dick?' cried my uncle, who came running up with Bony, who began to feel me all over.

"'I don't think I am, uncle,' I said angrily; 'but the thing gave me a horrible bang.'

"'Pick up your gun then and come along, lad. You hit the brute with both barrels, and I know I did once. Come along. Load as you run.'

"Bony had already gone on in the serpent's track, for after I had been sent over by a blow as the reptile writhed so fiercely, it had straightened itself out, and gone straight down the little valley towards more open ground.

"'Obe-ally-yolly!' shouted Bony, and running after him I found that the serpent was gliding about in a rapid way amongst some tall trees, with the black darting at it and hitting it with his club from time to time, but apparently without making any impression.

"'Stand back, Bony,' cried my uncle, waving the black away, and then, as Bony leaped back, pre-

paring to fire. But he lowered his gun as I came up. 'No,' he said, 'you shall give him the coup de grace, Dick'; and feeling no fear now, I finished the loading of my gun and went in among the trees.

- "'Fire at its head,' cried my uncle; but it was not easy to see it, for the creature kept on twining about in a wonderfully rapid way; but at last I caught it as the head came from behind a tree trunk, fired, and the monster leaped from the ground and fell back in a long straight line, perfectly motionless, till Bony darted in to give it a final thump with his club, when, to my astonishment, the blow seemed to electrify the creature, which drew itself up into a series of waves, and kept on throbbing as it were from end to end.
 - "'Shall I fire again?' I said excitedly.
- "'No,' he replied; 'it would only be slaying the slain. Bravo, my boy! you did capitally.'
- "'But I ran away at first, uncle,' I said sorrow-fully. 'I did not stop when the serpent first came out.'
- "'It was enough to make a St. George run away from such a dragon,' he said laughing. 'I could not have believed such a serpent existed in these isles. Let's see how long he is.'
 - "' Thirty feet,' I cried excitedly.

- "'Your eyes magnify this morning,' he said merrily. 'No, my boy,' he continued after pacing along by the writhing creature's side; "that serpent is barely fourteen feet long, but it is wonderfully, thick for its size, and it proves that there must be animals here such as would form its prey."
- "That was an experience worthy of the name," cried Chot.
- "One I would rather hear about than take part in," admitted Tom.
- "Makes me anxious to hear more," suggested Fleet.
 - "Yes, please go on," assented the others.

CHAPTER XX

A DANGEROUS VENTURE

"I had one or two more slight touches of fever while on the island, and my uncle was poorly once, but he so skillfully treated us both that the disease was soon mastered, and the trouble passed over. Taken altogether, though, we found the island a most delightful place of residence, and it was with feelings of real regret that I sat in our swift boat one day with the big sail set, skimming over the smooth sea, all our stores on board, and uncle at the helm steering due north, for we had bidden the beautiful island farewell, and its shores were beginning to grow distant to our eyes.

"Bony was as happy as could be. He laughed and chattered and pointed out the fish to me as we skimmed over the shallow water of the coral reefs, sometimes approaching islands whose names we did not know, and which were apparently too small to be down in the chart; but whatever temptations they might hold out my uncle steered right on due north, and on the evening of the second day there was land stretching east and west as far as we could see.

"'It's New Guinea,' said my uncle, and then—
'Hallo! what's the matter with Bony?'

"That gentleman had been lying down in the bottom of the boat fast asleep for the past three hours, as he was to sit up and bear me company through a part of the night; but having woke up and caught sight of the land he seemed to have become furious.

"Having been with us now so long, he had picked up a good many words, just as we had picked up a good many of his, so that by their help and signs we got along pretty well. But now it was quite startling to see his excitement. He seemed so agitated that he could only recollect the word no, and this he kept on repeating as he dashed at me and then left me, to run to my uncle, seizing the tiller and trying to drag it round so as to alter the direction of the boat.

"'No, no, no, no, no!' he cried. Then pointing to the land he came at me, caught up his spear, and I thought he was going to kill me, for he made a

savage thrust at me which went right past my arm; dropped the spear, caught up his club, forced back my head over the gunwale of the boat, raised his club and made believe to beat me to death, hammering the boat side with all his might. After this he made a sham attack upon my uncle, who, however, took it cooly, and only laughed after seeing the attack upon me, though I had noticed one hand go to his gun when Bony made at me with the spear.

"After the black had worked himself up into a perspiration, instead of, as I expected, bursting out laughing, he kept on pointing to the land, crying, 'No, no, no!' and then, 'Kill bird, kill man, my boy, kill Bony. No, no, no!'

- "'You mean that the savages will kill us if we land?' I enquired.
- "'Kill, kill,' he cried nodding his head excitedly, and banging the side of the boat with his club.
- "'Well done. Your English is splendid, but they sha'n't kill us, Bony,' cried my uncle, taking up his gun and pointing it at the shore; while, to make his meaning clearer, I did the same. 'Shoot — kill man.'
- "'Shoot! kill!' cried Bony, who evidently understood, for he picked up his spear, and thrust with it fiercely towards the shore.

"'He seems to know the character of the New Guinea savages,' said uncle. 'I have always heard that they are a fierce and cruel set, but we shall soon see whether it is safe to land.'

"We sailed gently on, for it turned out a glorious moonlight night, and altering our course a little we were at sunrise within a couple of miles of what seemed to be a very beautiful country, wooded to the shore, and rising up inland to towering mountains. Great trees seemed to prevail everywhere, but we saw no sign of human being.

"'The place looks very tempting,' said uncle, 'and if we can hit upon an uninhabited part I expect that we should find some capital specimens for our cases. Let us see what the place is like.'

"Bony tried in his fashion to dissuade us from going farther, and it was evident that the poor fellow was terribly uneasy as the boat was run in close to the shore, when all at once about a dozen nude black savages came running down to the water's edge, making signs to us to land, and holding up bunches of bright feathers and rough skins of birds.

"'They look friendly,' said my uncle. 'Look here; I will land and take them a few presents in beads and brass wire; we shall soon see if they mean mischief.'

"'I'll go with you, uncle,' I said.

"'No; you stop with the boat and keep her afloat. Here are the guns all ready loaded. I don't suppose there will be any danger; but if there is, you must pepper the enemy with small shot to keep them back — that is, of course, if you see them attack me. I shall take Bony,' he continued. 'They may be as simple-hearted and friendly as the others we have met, and this country must be so grand a collecting ground that I cannot afford to be scared away by what may be false reports raised by people who have behaved ill to the natives.'

"He took out a few strings of brightly colored beads and a little roll of brass wire, and waved them in the air, when the savages shouted and kept on making signs to us to land.

"We were only about twenty yards from the sandy shore now, and we could see every expression of face of the New Guinea men, as my uncle threw one leg over the side and then stood up to his knees in the clear water.

"Bony's club was already in his lingouti, and picking up his spear he too leaped into the water, while I sat down in the boat with the barrel of my gun resting on the gunwale as the sail flapped and the boat rocked softly to and fro.

"The people seemed to be delighted as my uncle waded in; but I noted that they carefully avoided wetting their own feet, keeping on the dry sand, talking eagerly among themselves; and though I looked attentively I could see no sign of arms or any cause for alarm.

"So peaceful and good-tempered did they all look that I was completely thrown off my guard, and wondered how Bony could be so cowardly as to keep about a yard behind my uncle, who walked up to them fearlessly, and held out his hand with a string of beads.

"The New Guinea men chattered and seemed delighted, holding out their hands and catching eagerly at the beads, snatching them from the giver's hands, and asking apparently for more.

"I saw uncle sign to them that he wanted some of their birds in exchange. They understood him, for they held out two or three skins, and he advanced a step to take them; but they were snatched back directly, and, as if by magic, the savages thrust their hands behind them, and in an instant each man was flourishing a war-club.

"It all seemed to happen in a moment, and my heart seemed to stand still as I saw one treacherous savage, over six feet high, strike my uncle over the head with his club, my poor uncle falling as if he had been killed.

"It was now that I saw why Bony had held back behind my uncle, and it was fortunate that the faithful fellow had followed the guidance of his own reason. For, as in the midst of a tremendous shouting and yelling, the tall savage bent forward to again strike my uncle I saw Bony's lance point strike him in the throat, and he went down.

"This checked the savages for an instant, long enough to enable the black to stoop down and get a good grip of uncle's collar with his left hand, while with his right he kept making darts with his spear at the yelling savages, who kept striking at him with their clubs.

"So tremendous and so true were Bony's thrusts that I saw another great black go down, and a couple more run yelling back towards the dense cover from which they had come; but Bony was in a very critical position. My uncle was heavy, and the black had hard work to drag him over the sand towards the boat, and keep his enemies at bay.

"It was now that I saw what a brave warrior and chief our follower must be; but I also saw how his enemies had formed a half circle and were trying to get behind him and cut him off from the boat.

"For the first few moments I had felt helpless; then I had determined to leap over and go to their help; then I saw that I was best where I was, and took aim, ready to fire at the first chance, for I could do nothing at first for fear of injuring my friends. And besides, a horrible feeling of compunction had come upon me at the thought of having to fire at men — fellow creatures — and I shrank from drawing trigger.

"At last, though, I saw that further hesitation would be fatal. Bony was making a brave defense, and had wounded several of his assailants as he dragged my uncle to the water's edge. Another step and he could have waded, easily dragging my uncle over the water, but his enemies had made a savage dash, and one of the boldest had got hold of his spear.

"Another moment and he would have been struck down, when, hesitating no longer, I took quick aim and fired right into the thick of the black group as far on one side of my uncle as I could.

"As the report rang out, and the stinging shot hissed and scattered, injuring several, they uttered fierce yells and separated for a moment, giving me a better chance to fire again, and I did with such effect that the savage who was dragging at Bony's spear loosed his hold, turned, and ran for his life.

"It was a golden moment for our black friend, who made a couple of darts with his freed weapon, and then backing rapidly drew my uncle through the water towards the boat.

"The savages were staggered by the shot from my gun. Many were wounded, but they were trifling small shot-wounds, which only infuriated them as they saw their prey escaping, and with a rush they came tearing through the water, whirling their clubs above their heads and yelling furiously.

"My blood was up now, and in those brief moments I saw our fate, that of being massacred by these treacherous ruthless wretches, to whom we had made offerings of peace and good-will. I seemed to see our battered boat, and then friends at home waiting for news of those who had sailed out here on a peaceful expedition, news that would never come; and a curious pang came over me as I felt that I must save uncle and his brave defender if I could.

"I had already picked up my uncle's loaded double gun, and there were two rifles also loaded ready to my hand, so, taking careful aim now at the foremost of the savage crew just as they were pressing Bony hard, I fired.

"I could not see for a moment for the smoke, but as it parted I saw that the men were close enough now for the shot to have much more serious effect. Two had fallen, but after a moment's hesitation the others made a fresh rush, which I met with another shot, which checked them again; but though another man fell, and half a dozen more were streaming with blood they only seemed the more infuriate and again came on.

"I did not even then like to use the fatal rifles, but found time to cram in a couple more cartridges, and by this time Bony had dragged my uncle to the boat, stooped, lifted him in, and then with one hand upon the gunwale kept shoving her off, backing and wading, and thrusting with his spear at the fierce wretches who came on more savagely than ever.

"The boat moved slowly, but I was hot with excitement now, and I fired once at a savage who was striking at Bony, then at a group, and then there was a dull heavy thud as a war-club that had been thrown with clever aim struck me full in the forehead, and I fell senseless in the bottom of the boat."

CHAPTER XXI

SAVED

"When I came to, it was with a terrible pain in my head, and a misty feeling of having been taken by the savages, who had laid me down and were having a war-dance of triumph around me.

"'Hi, yi, yi - Hi, yi, yi! Hey!'

"Then it kept on in a shrill tone till it seemed, as my head ached so badly, almost maddening.

"At last I raised my heavy eyelids and saw that instead of lying on the sand surrounded by the savages, I was some distance from the shore and in the boat. I could dimly see, as through a mist, the savages on the beach, and they were shouting, yelling, and threatening us with their war-clubs; but it was Bony who was apparently about to dance the bottom out of the boat, and keeping up that abominable 'Hi, yi, yi!' his song of triumph for the victory he had won.

"'Hi, yi, yi — Hi, yi, yi! Hey!'

"The Hey! was accompanied by a tremendous jump, and a flourish of the spear at the savages on shore, whom the defiance seemed to madden as they rushed about furiously waving their clubs and yelling with all their might. Sometimes they dashed into the water right to their chests, some swam out with their war-clubs in their teeth, and some went through a pantomine in which we were all supposed to be beaten down and being pounded into jelly upon the shore.

"All this delighted Bony, who varied his warsong by making derisive gestures, showing his utter contempt for his cowardly enemies, all of which seemed to sting them to fury, and I began to wonder how we should get on if they had canoes.

"For our boat was floating gently along about sixty yards from the shore with the sail flapping about, the current driving her away, but the rollers carrying her in.

"At first I could do nothing but sit there and gaze, sometimes at Bony, and sometimes at the savages. Then in a sleepy stupid way I looked at my uncle, who was lying in the bottom of the boat with his eyes closed and perfectly motionless.

"Somehow my state then did not trouble me

much, only that I wished my head would not ache quite so badly. I was quite aware that we were in danger, but that seemed to be quite natural; and at last I began to wonder why I did not begin doing something, and why my uncle did not get up.

"At last it seemed to occur to Bony that it was time for him to finish shouting, and he laid his spear down, came to me, and lifted me, so that my head was over the side of the boat, and he then scooped up the cool water and bathed my face, with such satisfactory effect that I was able to think clearly; and thanking him, I was about to perform a similar duty for my uncle, when, to my horror, I saw a crowd of savages running a couple of canoes over the sands, evidently to launch them, and finish the treacherous work that they had begun.

"For a few moments I felt paralyzed, but recovering myself I made a sign to Bony, hoisted the great sail to its fullest height, and as the boat careened over I hurried aft to the tiller and the sail began slowly to fill, and our boat to move gently through the water.

"Never had it moved so slowly, though, before, for the breeze was very light, and it seemed as if the savages must get their canoes launched, and have paddled out to us before we could get up any speed.

"They saw this, and kept on shouting and working with all their might, moving first one canoe and then another to the edge of the water, launching them, springing in, and the next moment the air was black with paddles.

"Again an instant and the sea was foaming with their vigorous strokes.

"But for the fact that the canoes were very large and heavy and took time to get well in motion, we must have been overtaken, for the wind seemed to be playing with our sail, one moment filling it out, the next letting it flap idly as the boat rose and fell upon the waves.

"Seeing that I could do no more I fastened the tiller with a piece of cord and rapidly reloaded the guns, Bony picking up his spear, and, to my horror, beginning to shout at and deride the savages.

"It would have made little difference, I suppose, for the blacks would have killed us without mercy had they overhauled us, and that they seemed certain to do, for they were paddling steadily and well, their blades being plunged into the water with the greatest regularity, making it foam and sparkle as they swept along.

"So fast did they seem to come, uttering in chorus a sort of war-cry at each plunge of the paddles, that I wondered why they did not overhaul us, so slowly did we seem to move, and at last, as they got their canoes in full swing, they came on hand over hand, getting so near that the men in the bows made ready their spears to hurl, and I raised my gun, meaning to make as brave an end as I could.

"I was too much excited to feel frightened now. I suppose there was not time, all my thoughts being turned upon the acts of the savages, one of whom now threw a spear, which fell short.

"I took aim at him, but did not fire, thinking that I would reserve the shot till we were in greater danger, and hoping that a couple of well-directed charges might have the effect of deterring them from further pursuit. But still on they came just abreast, and it was evident that they meant to attack on each side of our poor little boat, which looked so small beside the long war-canoes, each of which contained about forty men.

"They uttered a loud yell now, for the boat seemed to stand still and the sail began to flap. Just then half a dozen spears were thrown, and I nearly fell overboard, only saving myself by making a snatch at one of the stays.

"It was not that I was struck by a spear, but that the boat had given a leap and bent down till it seemed as if she would capsize. In fact she would have gone down with her sail flat upon the water if I had not eased off the sheet as she went slipping through the waves at a tremendous rate.

"It was a work of moments, and then when I turned my head it was to see that the canoes were double the distance behind with the savages paddling furiously; but I saw that if the wind held their case was like that of a pet spaniel running after a grayhound, for our boat kept careening over and literally racing through the sea.

"In five minutes I found that the canoes were so far behind that we had no more cause for fear, and, altering our course so as to sail gently on about a mile from the shore, I gave Bony the sheet to hold, knelt down, bathed uncle's face, and bound up a great cut that had laid open his head.

"My work had its reward, for, partly from the freshness of the water, partly from the pain I must have caused him, my uncle revived, stared wildly about him for a few minutes, and then, as he realized our position, he muttered a little to himself, and ended by shaking hands with me and Bony, holding the black palm of the latter in his

own for some moments, as he looked our follower in the face.

- "'I was much to blame, Dick,' said uncle, at last. 'I ought to have been more guarded; but I could not think that these people were so treacherous, and I wanted more specimens.'
- "' Perhaps we shall find a place by-and-by where there are no inhabitants,' I suggested."
- "'That is what I have been hoping for days,' he replied; and not long after we sailed round a headland into a beautiful bay with the whitest of sand, trees clustering amidst the lovely yellow stone cliffs, and a bright stream of water flowing through a gorge and tumbling over two or three little barriers of rocks before losing itself in the calm waters of the bay.
- "Some six or seven miles back was a high ridge of mountains, which seemed to touch the sea to east and west, cutting off as it were a narrow strip from the mainland, and this strip, some fifteen miles long and six wide at its greatest, was fertile in the extreme.
- "'Why, Dick,' my uncle cried, 'this should be as grand a place as our island. If it is free of savages it is the beau ideal of a naturalist's station. Look! what's that?'

"'I saw a deer come out of the wood to drink in the stream.'

"'Poor deer,' laughed my uncle, 'I'm afraid it will have to come into our larder, for a bit of venison is the very thing we want.'

"As he spoke he cautiously took up a rifle, rested it upon the edge of the boat, waited a few moments, and then fired at fully five hundred yards distance, the deer made one great bound and fell dead.

"'Good! Eatum,' said Bony approvingly; but instead of indulging in a frantic dance he shaded his eyes and gazed about in every direction, carefully sweeping the shore, and paying no heed to us as the boat was sailed close in.

"'As the keel was checked by the sand Bony leaped out, and I thought he was about to rush at the deer to skin it for food, but he ran off rapidly in one direction right along the shore, coming back at the end of a quarter of an hour, during which, after dragging our prize on board, we remained gun in hand upon the watch.

"Bony started again and went in the other direction, being away longer this time, but returning triumphant to indulge in a dance, and help drag in the boat before proceeding to light a fire. "Venison steaks followed, and after another exploration we found that we were in so thoroughly uninhabited a part of the island that we built a hut and slept ashore perfectly undisturbed.

"The next morning we had another exploration, to find that, as my uncle had supposed, the ridge of mountains cut us off from the rest of the island, and finding nothing to fear we once more set to work.

"Parrots were in profusion, and so were the great crowned pigeons; these latter becoming our poultry for the table. There was an abundance, though, of birds of large size, whose skins we did not care to preserve, but which, being fruit-eaters, were delicious roasted. Then we had another deer or two; caught fish in the bay; and literally revelled in the bounteous supply of fruit.

"Meanwhile we were working industriously over our specimens, finding many that were quite new to us. Sometimes we were shooting beside the lovely trickling stream where it gathered itself into pools to form tiny waterfalls, places where some birds seemed to love to come. At others beneath some great flower-draped tree, where the sun-birds hovered and darted. But the great objects of our search, the birds of paradise, haunted the nut and berry bearing trees. Some were always to be found by a kind of palm that attracted the pigeons as well, these latter swallowing fruit that looked as big as their heads.

"One day we had made a longer excursion than usual, and had been so successful that we were about to turn back, having a long afternoon's work before us to preserve our specimens. We had penetrated right to the mountainous ridge, and finding the ground rise very rapidly we came to a standstill, when a peculiar cry up amongst the tree-shadowed rocks above us made us forget our fatigue, especially as Bony was making signs."

CHAPTER XXII

THE LAST SHOT

"THE cry was so different to any that we had before heard that we felt that it must be some new bird, and full of eagerness set to work to stalk it.

"All at once what seemed a flash of dark blue darted from a tree, and before gun could reach shoulder it was gone.

"But Bony had been on the watch, and away he crept amongst the rocks and trees, following what we now took to be a prize, till we saw him a quarter of a mile away holding up his spear as a signal.

"We followed cautiously, and with a look of intelligence in his eyes he signed to my uncle to go one way towards a clump of tall palms, and to me to go in the other direction.

"'Fire upwards,' whispered my uncle, and we parted.

"I knew from Bony's ways that the bird must

be in one of these trees, and with my eyes sweeping the great leaves in all directions I tried to make out the bird, but in vain, and I had advanced so near that I gave up all hope of seeing it, when suddenly from the other side there was a shot, then another, and feeling satisfied that my uncle had secured the prize I was completely taken off my guard, and stared with astonishment as a large bird with tail quite a couple of feet long swept by me towards the dense undergrowth of the lower ground, where it would have been in vain to hunt for it.

"Just, however, as the bird was darting between the trees I raised my gun and make a quick snap shot at quite sixty yards' distance, and then called myself a stupid for not being more ready and for wasting a charge of powder and shot.

- " My uncle hailed me now.
- "'Any luck?' he cried as he came up.
- "'No,' I replied. 'I made a flying shot, but it was too far off.'
- "'So were mine,' he said, 'but I fired on the chance of getting the bird. It was a bird of paradise different to any I have seen. We must come again. I never had a chance at it.'
 - "'But I did,' I said dolefully, 'and missed it.'
 - "'Where was it when you fired?'

- "'Down among those trees. I let it go too far,' I replied.
- "'Why, you hit it, after all,' it was my delight to hear him say. 'There's Bony.'
- "I looked, and sure enough, there was our black companion holding up the bird in triumph. He had seen it fall when I shot, marked it down, and found it amongst the dense undergrowth, placing it before us with hardly a feather disarranged.

"It was a splendid bird, the last we shot in New Guinea, and over three feet long, its tail being two, and of a lovely bluish tint. If looked at from one side it was bronze, from the other green, just as the light fell, while from its sides sprung magnificent plumes of rich blue and green. They were not long filmy plumes like those of the great bird of paradise, but short, each widening towards the end, and standing up like a couple of fans above the wings.

"It was a feast to gaze upon so lovely an object of creation, and I felt more proud of having secured that specimen than of any bird I had shot before.

"It was soon time to return to our boat. We had only about three miles to go if we could have flown like birds; but the way lay in and out of rocks, with quite a little precipice to descend at

times, so that the journey must have been double that length. The hope of a good meal, however, made us trudge on, and after a few stops to rest I saw that we must now be nearing the shore, for the ground was much more level.

"So different did it appear, though, that I hardly recognized some of it, and had it not been for Bony I am sure we should have gone astray; but, savage like, he seemed to have an unerring instinct for finding his way back over ground he had been over before, and we had only to look back at him if we were in front for him to point out the way with the greatest of confidence.

"We were trudging on in front, talking in a low tone about making another expedition into the mountainous part, in the hope of finding it, the higher we climbed, more free from risk of meeting natives, and we were now getting so near the shore that we could hear the beat of the waves upon a reef that lay off our hut, and sheltered the boat from being washed about, when all of a sudden, as we were traversing some low scrubby bushes which were more thorny than was pleasant, Bony suddenly struck us both on the shoulder, forcing us down amongst the leaves and twigs, and on looking sharply round we saw that he had dropped our

splendid specimens, and, wild eyed and excited, he was crouching too.

"'Why, Bony,' began my uncle; but the black clapped his hand upon his mouth, and then pointed to the shore in front.

"I felt my blood turn cold; for there, not fifty yards away, and dimly seen through the shade of leaves, was a party of about fifty New Guinea men, with a couple of dozen more in three canoes that were lying just outside the reef. They were a fierce-looking lot, armed with spears, axes, and clubs, and they were gesticulating and chattering fiercely about our boat.

"I heard my uncle utter a groan, for it seemed as if the labors of all these months upon months of collecting were wasted, and that specimens, stores, arms, everything of value, would fall into the hands of these savages. He was perfectly calm directly after, and crouched there with his gun ready for a chance, should there be any necessity for its use; but he knew that it was useless to attempt to fight, all we could do was to save our lives.

"After about half an hour's talk the savages embarked, taking our boat in tow behind one of their canoes, and we saw the bright water flash as the paddles beat regularly, and the men sent their craft along till they swept round the headland west of the bay and were gone.

- "'Oh, uncle!' I cried as soon as we were safe.
- "'It is very hard, my boy,' he said sadly; 'but it might have been worse. We have our lives and a little ammunition; but the scoundrels have wrecked my expedition.'
 - "' And we have no boat."
- "'Nor anything else, Dick,' he said cheerfully.

 But we have plenty of pluck, my boy, and Bony will help us to make a canoe to take us to the Moluccas, where I daresay I can get some merchant to fit us out again. Well, Bony,' he cried, 'all gone!'
- "'Man-kill gone,' replied Bony, shaking his spear angrily, and then he kept repeating the word Owé boat, as we went down to the shore.
- "'Let's see if they have left anything in the hut,' said my uncle. 'We must have food even if we are stripped.'
- "We turned through the bushes and made our way into the little arbor-like spot beside the stream where Bony had built our hut beneath a splendid tree, when, to our utter astonishment, we found that the savages had not seen our little home, but had caught sight of the boat, landed and carried it

off, without attempting to look for its owners. No one had been there since we left, that was evident; and pleased as we were, our delight was more than equalled by Bony's, for laying down our specimens, this time more carefully, he refreshed himself with a dance before lighting a fire, where a capital meal was prepared, which we thankfully enjoyed as we thought of the benefits we received by having the forethought to carry everything out of the boat and placing it under cover for fear of rain.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN ANXIOUS TIME

"THE savages then had taken nothing but our boat, and the next thing was to set to work to construct another, for my uncle said he should not feel satisfied to stay where we were longer, without some means of retreat being ready for an emergency.

"Before lying down we managed to ask Bony what he thought of our being able to build a canoe that would carry us and our luxuries. For reply he laughed, pointed to our axes and to the trees, as if to say, What a foolish question when we have all the material here!

"I was so wearied, and slept so heavily, that I had to be awakened by my uncle long after the sun was up.

"'Come,' he said, 'I want you to make a fire. Bony has gone off somewhere.'

"I made the fire, after which we had a hasty breakfast, and then worked hard at skin making — preserving all our specimens.

"The day glided by, but Bony did not come, and feeling no disposition to collect more, in fact not caring now to fire, we had a look round to see which would be the most likely place to cut down a tree and begin building a boat.

"'It is lucky for us,' said my uncle, 'that Bony belongs to a nation of boat-builders. Perhaps he has gone to search for a suitable place and the kind of wood he thinks best; but I wish he would come.'

"Night fell and no Bony. The next morning he was not there; and as day after day glided by we set ourselves to work to search for him, feeling sure that the poor fellow must have fallen from some precipice and be lying helpless in the forest. But we had no success, and began to think then of wild beasts, though we had seen nothing large enough to be dangerous, except that worst wild beast of all, savage man.

"Still we searched until we were beginning to conclude that he must have been seen by a passing canoe whose occupants had landed and carried him off.

"'I don't think they would though,' I said; 'he

is too sharp and cunning. Why, it would be like seeking to catch a wild bird to try and get hold of Bony, if he was out in the woods.'

"'Perhaps you are right,' said my uncle. 'There is one way, though, that we have never tried, I mean over the mountain beyond where you shot that last bird. To-morrow we will go across there and see if there are any signs of the poor fellow. If we see none then we must set to work ourselves to build a canoe or hollow one out of a tree, and I tremble for the result.'

"'Shall we be able to make one big enough to carry our chests,' I inquired.

"'No, I don't expect it,' was the reply. 'If we can contrive one that will carry us to some port we must be satisfied. There I can buy a boat, and we must come back for our stores.'

"We devoted the next two days to a long expedition, merely using our guns to procure food, and reluctantly allowing several splendid birds to escape.

"But our expedition only produced weariness; and footsore and worn out we returned to our hut, fully determined to spend our time in trying what we could contrive in the shape of a boat, falling fast asleep, sad at heart indeed, for in Bony we felt that we had lost a faithful friend.

"'It is of no use to be down-hearted,' said my uncle the next morning. 'Cheer up, my lad, and let's look our difficulties in the face. That's the way to overcome them, I think.'

"I felt better that morning, and told my uncle so.

"'Nothing like a good night's rest, for raising the spirits,' he said. 'This loss of the boat and then of our follower, if he is lost, are two great misfortunes, but we must bear in mind that before all this nothing hardly but success attended us.'

"'Except with the savages, uncle,' I said.

"'Right: except with the savages. Now let's go down to the shore and have a good look out to sea.'

"We walked down close to the water, and having satisfied ourselves that no canoes were in sight, we made a fire, at which our coffee was soon getting hot, while I roasted a big pigeon, of which food we never seemed to tire, the supply being so abundant that it seemed a matter of course to shoot two or three when we wanted meat.

"'I'd give something,' said my uncle, as we sat there in the soft, delicious sea air, with the sunshine coming down like silver rays through the glorious foliage above our heads—'I'd give something, if boat-building had formed part of my education.'

- "'Or you had gone and learned it like Peter the Great.'
- "'Exactly,' he replied. 'But it did not, so we must set to work at once and see what we can do. Now what do you say? How are we to make a boat?'
- "'I've been thinking about it a great deal,' I said, 'and I was wondering whether we could not make a bark canoe like the Indians.'
 - "'A bark canoe, eh?'
- "'I've seen a model of one, and it looks so easy,"
 I said.
- "'Yes, my boy, these things do look easy; but the men who make them, savages though they be, work on the experience of many generations. It took hundreds of years to make a good bark canoe, and I'm afraid the first manufacturers of that useful little vessel were drowned. No, we could not make a canoe of that kind.'
- "'Then we must cut down a big tree and hollow it out, only it will take a long time.'
- "'Yes, but suppose we try the medium way. I propose that we cut down a moderately-sized tree, and hollow it out for the lower part of our boat, drive pegs all along the edge for a support, and

weave in that a basket-work of cane for the sides as high as we want it.'

- "'But how could we make the sides watertight, uncle?' I said; 'there seem to be no pine-trees here to get pitch or turpentine.'
- "'No, but there is a gum to be found in large quantities in the earth if we can discover any. The Malays called it dammar, and use it largely for torches. It strikes me that we could turn it into a splendid varnish, seeing what a hard resinous substance it is. Bony would have found some very soon, I have no doubt.'
- "'Then I must find some without him,' I said.
 'I shall go hunting for it whenever I am not busy boat-building.'
- "He smiled at my enthusiasm, and after examining the skins to see that they were all dry and free from attacks of ants, we each took a hatchet and our guns, and proceeded along by the side of the shore in search of a stout straight tree that should combine the qualities of being light, strong, easy to work, and growing near the sea."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN APPARITION

- "WE quite came to the conclusion that we should have a great deal of labor, and only learn by experience which kind of tree would be suitable, perhaps having to cut down several before we found one that would do.
 - "' And that will be bad, uncle,' I suggested.
- "'It will cause us a great deal of labor,' he replied smiling; 'but it will make us handy with our hatchets.'
- "'I did not mean that,' I replied; 'I was thinking of savages coming in this direction and seeing the chips and cut-down trees.'
- "'That would be bad,' he admitted; 'but as we are cut off so from the rest of the island, we must be hopeful that we may get our work done before they come.'
 - "We spent four days hunting about before we

found a tree that possessed all the qualities we required. We found dozens that would have done, only they were far away from the shore, where it would have been very difficult to move our boat afterwards to the water's edge.

"But the tree we selected offered us a thick straight stem twenty feet long, and it was so placed that the land sloped easily towards the sea, and it was sufficiently removed from the beach for us to go on with our work unseen.

"We set to at once to cut it down, finding to our great delight as soon as we were through the bark that the wood was firm and fibrous, and yet easy to cut, so that after six hours' steady chopping we had made a big gap in the side, when we were obliged to leave off because it was dark.

"We worked the next day and the next, and then my uncle leaned against it while I gave a few more cuts, and down it went with a crash amongst the other trees, to be ready for working up into the shape we required.

"Next morning as soon as it was light we began again to cut off the top at the length we intended to have our boat, a task this which saved the labor of chopping off the branches. I worked hard, and the labor was made lighter by uncle's pleasant conversation. For he chatted about savage and civilized man, and laughingly pointed out how the latter had gone on improving.

"'You see what slow laborious work this chipping with our axes is,' he said one day as we kept industriously on, 'when by means of cross-cut saws and a circular saw worked by steam this tree could be soon reduced to thin boards ready for building our boat.'

"Birds came and perched near us, and some were very rare in kind, but we felt that we must leave them alone so as to secure those we had obtained, and we worked patiently on till at the end of a week the tree began to wear outside somewhat the shape of a boat, and it was just about the length we required.

"It was terribly hard work, but we did not shrink, and at last, after congratulating ourselves upon having got so far without being interfered with by the savages, we had shouldered our guns and were walking back to the hut one evening when we caught sight of a black figure running across an opening, and we knew that our time of safety was at an end.

"'It is what I have always feared,' said my uncle quickly. 'Quick; put big-shot cartridges in your

gun. We will not spill blood if we can help it, but it is their lives or ours, and we must get safely back home.'

- "' What shall we do now?' I said huskily.
- "'Wait and see what the enemy mean to do, and —'
- "'Hi, yi, yi Hi, yi, yi. Hey. Ung-kul!' came shrilly through the trees.
- "'Hooray!' I shrieked, leaping out of my hidingplace. 'Bony! Bony! Hi, yi, yi — Hi, yi, yi. Hooray!'
- "'We ran to meet him, and he bounded towards us, leaping, dancing, rolling on the ground, hugging us, and seeming half mad with delight as he dragged us down to the sea-side, where a new surprise awaited us.

"For there upon shore, with her anchor fixed in the sands, lay our boat apparently quite uninjured.

As Bony danced about and patted the boat and then himself, it was plain enough to read the cause of his disappearance. He had gone off along the shore following the savages to their village, and then watched his opportunity to sail off. And this he had of course done, placing the boat safely in its old moorings.

"He made signs for something to eat, and then

I noticed that he looked very thin; and it was evident that the poor fellow had suffered terrible privations in getting back our treasure, and proving himself so good a friend.

"'Don't you feel disappointed?' said my uncle smiling. 'We shall not be able to finish our boat.'

"'I shall get over it,' I said. 'Hallo! what's the matter with Bony?'

"For before he had half finished eating he jumped up and made signs to us which we did not understand, and then began to drag one of the chests down towards the boat.

"'I see; he means it is not safe to stay,' said my uncle, and setting to work we got all our treasures safely on board, with such food and fruit as we had ready, filled the water barrel, and then paused.

"But Bony was not satisfied; he chattered excitedly and signed to us to launch the boat.

"'I'll take his advice,' said my uncle. 'He means that the savages may be in pursuit.'

"So pushing off, the sail was hoisted, and in the bright starlight of the glorious night we sailed away, carefully avoiding the reef, where the rollers were breaking heavily, and before we were half a mile from the shore Bony pressed my arm and pointed.

"The sight I saw was convincing. We had gotten away none too soon. There were a number of boats filled with savages making for the spot we had left. But we got away and here ends my story."

"A tale well worthy of record in the annals of the Experience Club, I suggest," said Mr. Shelton.

"It surely shall be," said the boys, in unison.

"A glorious day we have had, climaxed by an evening delightfully spent," concluded Mr. Shelton.

"Ever to be remembered by we comrades," chorused the boys as they said "good night."

CHAPTER XXV

A CALL FOR HELP

The entire company, at the earnest solicitation of the major and Mrs. Wharton, remained for the night at commodious Red Oaks. The next day they went their respective ways; Mr. and Mrs. Shelton returning to Rosado and the comrades going with Mr. Wilde to spend a few days at his ranch. There they installed a wireless outfit and several days later returned to the Shelton ranch.

Chot found a letter awaiting his return which was to affect in a marked manner the chums' plans for the near future. It was from one of the professors of their school, and contained an invitation for the three boys to join a party to be organized to visit Arizona.

The professor wrote that he had quite by accident met Mr. Duncan, Chot's father, and had learned of the presence of the comrades in New

Mexico. He had immediately solicited the privilege of asking them to join his proposed expedition.

He wrote at some length about his intentions and plans. It seemed that in some way he had learned of the existence, somewhere on the Great Divide, of a remnant band of Aztecs. That they possessed many relics of inestimable value. To the student of the age when they dominated the southern land, an investigation of their homes and habits would prove most interesting.

The subject was laid before Mr. Shelton, for of course the comrades were upon the instant eager for the outing.

"It's a wild, unexplored and dangerous country," said Mr. Shelton. "Few have ever penetrated the mountain fastness of the section you describe."

"It appeals to me!" cried Chot, and in his decision the others agreed.

"Our stay with you is near its end," suggested Fleet, addressing their host, "and this fits in just right to fill out the summer."

"There is only one thing," demurred Tom, "that would hold me back, and that's the cost. But it seems the professor proposes to pay all expenses."

So it was arranged that Tom and Fleet should

write home for the needed consent of their parents, which were duly given, and in "Comrades on the Great Divide" is detailed the wonderful experiences of the boys in Arizona.

Affairs at the hacienda de rosado had resumed their usual routine, the cattle and sheep had been put again in the corrals, and the comrades went riding, hunting and fishing without thoughts of the bandits, who had not been heard from after their attempted ambush of the major and his party on the night of the Fourth.

The comrades were out for a hunt for jack rabbits one afternoon several days after their return from their visit.

"I hope," said Chot, "that there will be a round up of those outlaws before the professor's arrival."

"We surely ought to be in at the finish," assented the others, and their ambition was to be of early realization. When they came in toward evening they were met at the entrance to the patio by Mrs. Shelton.

"There has been somebody calling on the wireless at intervals nearly all the afternoon," she said, "but I haven't been able to make anything out of it. I don't know whether it is their fault or mine." "Must be theirs," responded Chot gallantly. "Who was it?"

"That is what I could not make out," replied Mrs. Shelton. "It seemed to be all of a jumble. There goes the instrument again," as the mechanism began clicking.

"Sounds like a beginner," observed Chot. "I will see what I can make out of it," saying which he went to the apparatus. "Hallo! Who is this?" he signaled, after he had listened for a moment. "It sounds like a lot of gibberish."

"That is the way it sounded to me," interposed Mrs. Shelton. "I thought I couldn't hear straight."

"Hallo!" flashed Chot impatiently.

"Ask who is at the other end," proposed Tom.

"Look here, boys," Chot suddenly exclaimed.

"There has been some one tampering with the wires. Here is one cut clean through."

It was as he described.

"Who could have done it?" asked Tom.

"It's a matter we must look into," determined Chot.

"We can make a temporary shift," suggested Fleet, proceeding as he spoke to connect the two ends with some flexible small wire. This was but the work of a few moments. "That will do for the emergency," said Chot.

"Now let me try again. Hallo," he again flashed.

"Now there is something coming," exclaimed Tom. "Hum, it's 'Jelly.'"

"I guess somebody wants to get your receipt for making Jelly, Mrs. Shelton."

"Maybe it's 'Nellie,'" suggested Fleet with a gleam of inspiration.

"That must be it," assented Chot. "She is mixing her letters all up like a logogriph puzzle.

"Tell her to go slow," suggested Tom. "Maybe she will do better."

"And go slow yourself, so she can understand it," advised Fleet, as Chot began thumping the key.

"Hello, Nellie!" signaled Chot more slowly.
"Can you get this?"

"Yes. Alle light," was the response.

"'Alle light!'" commented Tom. "Must be a chink at the other end."

"Means all right," interjected Fleet.

"Do you really think so?" drawled Tom.

"Take your time, Nellie," went on Chot. "You are mixing things all up."

"Oh, take your time, Miss Lucy, oh, take your time, Miss Long," sang Tom.

"If you don't keep quiet," threatened Chot, drop-

ping the receivers for a moment, "we will put you out of here."

- "The band —" the instrument slowly clicked.
- "The band!" exclaimed Tom. "Gee! is that band playing yet."
- "Don't be so previous!" interjected Fleet. "She means bandits."
- "Same thing," drawled Tom. "I'll bet when they aren't banding they can bandit with the best of them."
- "Be quiet!" commanded Chot. "We want to know what they have been doing."
 - "Playing a Hot Time, I bet," muttered Tom.
 - "A raid," announced Chot.
- "You bet they were arrayed," interrupted Tom.
 "Like Solomon in all his glory."
- "This is raid," protested Chot, "raid. Now will you be good."
- "Oh," commented Tom. "Why didn't you say so before?"
- "What is that," asked Mr. Shelton, who had just come in.
- "The bandits have been making a raid," explained Chot.
 - "When? Where?" asked Mr. Shelton.
 - "I am just trying to find out," answered Chot,

the instrument slowly clicking as the sender was more carefully sounding the letters. "Last night."

"Hot," went on Chot. "What was hot, Oh, shot."

"Mr. Wilde," the instrument clicked.

"What is that?" anxiously questioned Mr. Shelton. "Wilde shot. That's too serious. Something must be done to put a stop to this thing. We have let it go on too long."

"No, not very badly hurt," replied Nellie in answer to Chot's inquiry.

"I am glad of that," exclaimed Mr. Shelton.

"But we must certainly drive them out."

"Addle," slowly clicked out.

"Addled," repeated Chot, "I surely will be if this keeps up."

"What is she talking about now," demanded Tom. "Eggs?"

"Oh, saddle," reported Chot. "Stole the saddle, I don't see," he said, bewildered. "What does she mean by that?"

"The prize saddle that Miss Wilde won, of course," suggested Fleet.

"Of course," said Tom impressively. "Anybody would know that."

"Curly stopped this morning on his way to notify

the sheriff," Nellie ticked off. "Uncle thinks we ought to do something."

"Correct," interposed Tom. "We will do it."

"What?" asked Mr. Shelton amusedly.

"Hunt the bandit to his lair," responded Tom.

"Call up the captain and get him to attack the camp. He has had time enough to think about how to get around the Mexican end of it."

"That isn't a bad idea, Tom," agreed Mr. Shelton. "We must take measures to protect ourselves, Mexico or no Mexico. See if you can get the fort, Chot!"

"Hello! Hello! Lawton!" Chot sent the call crashing out into the air. "This is Rosado."

"Hello! Rosado!" was the quick response.
"How are you? What is the news from the mesa?"

"The bandits have broken out again," flashed Chot. "Is Captain Thomas there?"

"Right here," was the response. "What is wanted? he asks."

"The bandits have made another raid and shot the ranchero," telegraphed Chot.

"The captain asks for particulars," was the reply.

As briefly as possible the desired information was

communicated, and Chot ended by asking if help could not be rendered.

"Yes," was the response. "We were about to call you up to say that Lieut. Thomas was on the way to Rosado. Should arrive there this evening. He will give all needed information."

"Good!" exclaimed Tom, "there will be something doing."

"The lieutenant must have started yesterday if he is to arrive to-night. The trip from the fort, as you know, takes two days."

CHAPTER XXVI

A NIGHT WATCH

"Now the next thing is to find out, if we can, who it was that monkeyed with our wireless." Chot reported to Mr. Shelton the condition in which the boys had found the apparatus.

"There must be some one here on the ranch who is interested in the outlaws," was Mr. Shelton's spoken conclusion.

"Is there anyone among the help you might suspect?" inquired Tom.

"Not at this moment," answered Mr. Shelton. "Since Yuan went away to join, as we think, the outlaw band, there has been but one change. I feel entire confidence in all, excepting the new man who was engaged while you were at Wilde's place."

"That fellow with the full beard, who wears his hat over his face?"

"Yes. I do not think he has ever been up on this roof. He has no call to come here anyway. He

is a good worker, and tends strictly to his task."

"This was cut with some steel instrument. It was not broken. It is a sharp, clean cut," communicated Fleet, who was engaged in making repairs on the apparatus, reinforcing the temporary wire they had put in.

"They evidently wanted to put the wireless out of commission for some reason," suggested Chot.

"Say, boys," said Tom, after Mr. Shelton had left them, "let's have a squint at that new man, and see what he looks like."

"It is a good idea," the others agreed. So after the evening meal they went out in the corral, and without exciting attention, observed what was going on.

"Hum," murmured Chot, "there he goes now. Say, boys, don't you see something familiar in that walk?"

"I am not sure; what do you think?" asked Fleet.

"Mr. Newton Took or I lose my guess."

"I believe you are right, Chot," put in Tom.

"I am going to make some excuse and have a talk with him," announced Chot. "I'll accidentally knock his hat off, too, and get a better look at his face."

"Here, boys," came a call from the house.

"There is a friend of yours who has just arrived making inquiries for you."

The arrival was none other than Lieutenant Thomas, whose coming had been announced by the wireless. There was a cordial interchange of words of welcome with hearty greetings from the officer. He had delayed his coming somewhat by a long rest in the middle of the day, preferring to ride in the cool of the evening, and desiring to arrive after dark. He was not in uniform, and was charged with an important mission which he was to communicate to Mr. Shelton.

By special permission, however, the captain, his brother, had agreed that the comrades should be included in the conference. Final instructions concerning a contemplated move were to arrive over the wireless that night or the following morning, and one of the comrades would be delegated to receive and transcribe same.

"Then I'm for keeping watch of the wireless and for seeing that nothing happens to it," said Chot, continuing. "I am for bunking on the roof tonight."

"Better take turns," proposed Tom, and so it was arranged. Tom was to have the first watch

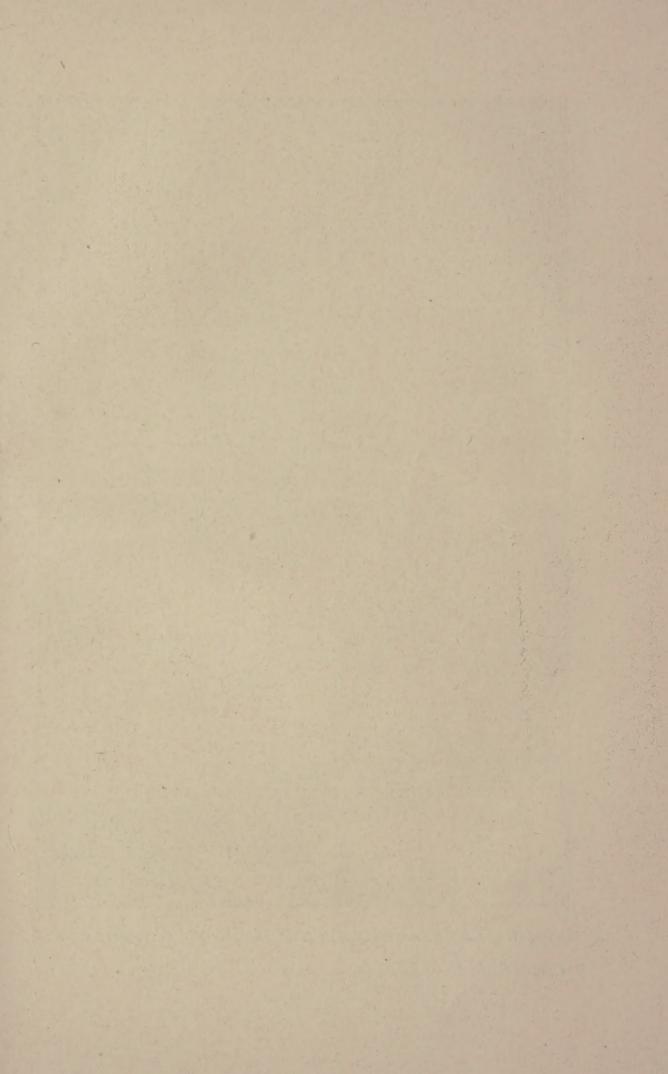
until twelve o'clock, then Fleet until three o'clock and Chot the remainder of the night.

The boys had a long talk with the lieutenant in the early evening, and learned of some of the details of the plan for the capture and wiping out of the outlaw band. The greatest secrecy was enjoined, for it was desirable that the bandits themselves should not get advance information concerning the contemplated move.

The party, excepting Tom, retired to rest at a reasonably early hour. "I will be of easy call if anything is wanted," said the lieutenant as he went to his room.

Tom sat patiently out his allotted time without incident, and as prearranged at twelve o'clock awoke Fleet for his turn of duty.

When Fleet took up the burden of the night watch he seated himself on a camp chair. The moon was shining, the stars in the northern half of the hemisphere were bright, and in their study and admiration, he after a time, lost consciousness of his immediate surroundings. Later on he walked about to rid himself of the drowsiness which he found it difficult to overcome. "Chot will have a dark watch," he mused. "The moon is near disappearing time and won't last long. There are





HE WAS ATTRACTED BY A MOTION OF THE SHADOW.

Comrades in New Mexico.

clouds which are spreading out to hide the stars."

He noted the lengthening stretch of the shadows cast by the chimney, and of a sudden noticed something else. On one side, the chimney's shadow was irregular, and he was attracted by a motion of the shadow, such as might be caused by the raising of a man's arm to his face. Assuredly there was someone hiding. Whoever it was, had forgotten that his bulky form caused a shadow in the moonlight. Fleet stood silent for a moment, then resumed his pacing back and forth, meantime reviewing in his mind what was best be done.

If he should attempt a capture of the person evidently present for no good, upon the roof, he might be overcome in the struggle, or the culprit might escape, his identity unknown. He did not wish to call aloud for help, that might be a signal for the quick making off of the man he felt sure was near at hand. Soon he reached a conclusion.

He walked sufficiently near the chimney to accomplish the purpose he had in mind, then stretching himself and uttering a sleepy yawn, he said, as if to himself:

"What's the use of bothering here, I am going to bed."

Then slowly he retraced his steps to the entrance

of the stairway. Immediately he arrived there he sped quickly to the room where Chot and Tom were sleeping.

"Quick, boys," he cried, "there is something doing."

Instantly the two boys were awake and alert. Tom had divested himself of his clothing, but Chot was ready and with Fleet returned at once to the exit upon the roof.

There they stopped a moment in the dark of the doorway to observe if they might, what was going on, and indistinctly they made out the figure of a man, some instrument in hand, preparing to molest the wireless apparatus.

At a whispered word each removed his shoes and then the man's back being towards them they cautiously advanced. Quicker than the telling they sprang upon the intruder and sought to bear him down. They had not, however, reckoned upon the enormous strength of their antagonist. They seemed like automatons in his grasp as he threw them aside. He was a full bearded man whom Chot made out at once to be the Newt. Took of unsavory memory way back on the farm.

Immediately Took had recovered from his momentary surprise, he drew from his belt a knife intent evidently on an attack, selecting Chot as his victim. With a muttered grumble of incoherent words, he moved toward him.

Just at this moment there was a newcomer upon the scene. In a clear, determined voice was called the words:—

"Stand, or I fire."

It was Lieutenant Thomas, and the glint of his revolver pointed at the heart of the desperado caused that individual to instantly halt.

"Now lay down that knife upon the chair beside you," was the next cool, determined order.

With evident reluctance and slowly under this compulsion and command, the knife was deposited.

"Fleet, secure the knife," and then again addressing the outlaw, the revolver still in hand, he commanded: "Now you, sit down on that chair. I propose to look you over to see if you have any other weapons upon your person."

With this statement the lieutenant handed the revolver to Chot, whom he stationed behind the chair with orders to snap the trigger if the captive made a move.

The outlaw was a living arsenal, and the lieutenant counted up of captured knives and revolvers, all told, no less than seven. "Now, boys, we will make more secure our captive. One of you bring a lasso or rope, and we will bind him secure, until the sheriff can be summoned."

Now for the first time spoke the man.

- "I didn't do nuffin'," he mumbled.
- "And you will be put where you can continue the same avocation," responded the lieutenant.
- "Sure that is Newt. Took," commented Fleet.
 "I would know that voice among a thousand."
- "There isn't the slightest question as to his identity now," assented Chot.

Took secured, an investigation was made. The apparatus had not been harmed. The boys had made their attack in the nick of time, for they found a sharp wire-cutter and a wrench already attached to their precious apparatus and ready for destructive work.

"Well, our duties are over for to-night," chorused Fleet and Tom. The latter had joined the party on the roof.

"I am going to stay by the prisoner," said Chot.

"He is too valuable an asset to take any chance of losing." So it was arranged, and early in the morning word was sent to the sheriff, who promptly

came to relieve the ranch of their incumbrance, and to carry Took to the lock-up.

"The first blow has fallen, and I hope now," said Mr. Shelton, "that the end of the outlaw camp is near at hand."

"You will be rid of one undesirable character for a considerable period. He will get free board at some local institution for a few months to come. That's quite sure," was the assuring remark of the lieutenant.

CHAPTER XXVII

A BOAT ON LAND

"How are you going to get down the river, lieutenant?" asked Chot. They were at breakfast the morning following the taking away of the prisoner Took. "Will you build a raft?"

"We thought of that," replied the lieutenant, but we were afraid if we set out to build a raft it would put the bandits on their guard and we want to take them by surprise. So the captain sent East for a boat that will accommodate a dozen or so. I expect it is over at the station now. We took the liberty of having it sent in your name, Mr. Shelton."

"Which was perfectly right," replied that gentleman.

"Can we go over to the station and get it?" asked Chot.

"That would be just the thing," said the lieutenant, "if you think you can manage it." "Sure we can," asserted Tom. "All we will need is a pair of mules and the running gear of wagon and we will sail here in style. When shall we start?"

"The sooner the better," answered the lieutenant.

"If you come back after dark it will be all the better, and so that no one will see it here I will arrange to have it immediately taken away to the cave."

The comrades were soon ready for the trip. They were given a team of sturdy mules, and on the running gear of a wagon, a light spring board with a wide seat was mounted. The sky was overcast and dark clouds hid the sun, so that the temperature was fairly cool and comfortable.

"It will be a new experience," said Fleet, "to travel over the desert in a boat."

"If any one asks you any questions about the boat," the lieutenant warned them when they rode off, "better give them an evasive answer, if you can."

"Like the Irish valet did?" asked Tom.

"How was that?"

"His master told him," replied Tom, "that if any one asked any question about him to give them an evasive answer.

- "'Troth an' Oi'll do the same,' replied Pat.
- "The next day when his master returned home from an absence Pat said to him: 'There was a gintlemon here to see you to-day.'
 - "'Indeed, and what did he say?'
- "'He said, "Is your master at home?" and shure Oi did as you towled me.'
 - "" What was that?"
 - "'Oi gave him an evasive answer.'
 - "'Indeed, and what did you say to him.'
 - "'Oi axed was his grandmother a monkey?'"
- "I don't think you need go so far as that," laughed the lieutenant.

The comrades found the boat at the station at Molino del Mesa where its presence had at first excited considerable curiosity among the inhabitants as to its purpose there in the desert. The comrades expected that they would be overwhelmed with questions from the cowboys and others gathered at the depot, but it turned out that some learned citizen had reached the sage conclusion that the boat was part and parcel of some novel wireless apparatus, and the explanation had satisfied the curious ones.

"Wasn't expecting another flood, was you?" asked someone jokingly.

- "Don't know," replied Tom. "Almost anything is likely to happen out here."
 - "Except rain," said another.
- "Just as well to be ready when it does come," replied Tom.
- "Make a dern good bath tub," commented another.

With the help of the cowboys the boat was placed upon the wagon and the boys started on their way back. They had gone about two-thirds of the way without incident and were just approaching a little woods and stream. It was known as Indian Well on account of the spring to which the Indians in the early days were wont to come.

- "This is the place where Curly and Pete held us up when we first came," remarked Chot, who was driving.
- "Gee!" replied Tom, "I thought the bandits had us for sure. I was scared good and plenty, as Curly says."
- "That was the beginning," went on Chot, "and we have had it pretty lively ever since. But with the capture of the outlaw gang things ought to be quiet again hereabouts for a while."
- "But you can't generally most always sometimes tell," observed Fleet sagely. "Anyway that was a

lucky suggestion that someone made about the boat being for the 'wireless.' It threw them off the track."

"I think we had better rest for a while when we get to the wood," said Tom. "It is getting to be hotter than pepper and there isn't a breath of air."

The wood lay in a hollow through which the little stream now a shallow brook, some fifteen feet in width, ran between high banks. In the spring when the snow on the mountains was melting it was a raging torrent.

"You will get all the air you want pretty soon," exclaimed Fleet, "if I am not mistaken in the look of things."

"What do you mean?" demanded Tom.

"There is a storm coming," returned Fleet.

"Look over there," indicating a heavy black cloud that was rapidly rising in the southwest.

"Hope it isn't going to be another sand storm," ejaculated Tom.

"Looks like a regular twister," said Chot. "We want to get under cover."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Tom, looking at it with awe. "It's a grand sight, but I believe it's a cyclone."

Away to the southwest a funnel-shaped cloud of inky blackness rising and falling like a gigantic ball was bounding toward them, now seeming to sweep along the ground and a moment later soaring several hundred feet in the air.

"Try and get under shelter," proposed Chot.
"We can drive into the hollow and get the protection of the bank beside the stream."

As this was clearly the best thing to do, the boys quickened the pace of the mules who were now becoming uneasy and drove into the stream close under the western bank where it rose the highest.

They were none too soon for when they stopped they could hear the humming of the whirling wind and a moment later the air was dark with flying sand thick with the fragments of broken trees and branches and thunderous with the crash of the falling wood.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE STORM

CROUCHING in terror beside the shivering mules in a darkness like that of night, the comrades awaited the passing of the storm. It was but a few moments before the air began to grow lighter and the noise to die away, though it seemed like an age to the boys and it was not for some time after the storm was over that they dared to desert their place of retreat and look about them.

"Hallo, boys, are you all right?" called Chot, who was the first to recover his self-possession.

"Seem to be," replied Tom. "Talk about experience, that was terrific. I don't want any more like it."

"Oh, it might be worse," said Chot cheerfully.

"Suppose we try to get out of here as quick as we can," interrupted Tom.

Sheltered beneath the bank the chums had not felt the force of the wind, which was shown, how-

ever, by the way it had uprooted a massive tree and in piling up the debris in a sort of gigantic brush heap. Over the boys, stretching from bank to bank, were interlaced a roof of branches and trunks of trees, some of them drooping so low as to almost shut them in. About and around the sand had been heaped, burying the wagon wheels up to their hubs.

"The first thing to do," asserted Chot, "is to get ourselves out, and the next thing is to get the mules out."

"But how?" inquired Tom, looking with something of dismay at the barricade that confronted them.

"By main strength and a little ingenuity, I guess," replied Chot.

Fortunately the tree in falling had made an archway. Through this, by much twisting and turning and pulling and by using the broken branches as levers, the comrades were able to make their way along under the tangle to the outside.

"Now for the mules," said Chot, after a breathing spell.

A careful examination of the situation was made and a plan determined upon. With much lifting, prying and pushing, scooping out the sand in one place and rolling a log aside in another, they made a way through which they were able to lead the mules one at a time from their temporary prison.

"It is all very well getting new experiences," protested Tom, dropping onto a convenient log, when they had at last gotten out the mules, "but if I had a choice in the matter I think I would prefer fighting in the Civil War to much of this."

"You mean the uncivil war, don't you?" laughed Chot. "I guess the atmosphere is getting in its work on you."

"There was a little too much atmosphere about it this time," objected Tom.

"Are you going to try and bring the boat out the same way?" asked Fleet.

"It's not going to be an easy task," Chot replied, but it's up to us to try."

Repeated efforts, however, convinced the boys that unaided, the boat and the carriage on which it rested could not be reclaimed.

"I think," said Chot, after considering the situation for a few moments, "the best thing to do would be to go to the hacienda and get some help and come back and dig the boat and the wheels out." "How are you going to get to the hacienda?" queried Tom.

"We have got the mules, haven't we?" asked Chot.

"Two mules and three of us," drawled Tom.
"Though the walking may be good, I am not in need of exercise, thank you."

"We can take turns riding double," suggested Fleet.

"Not any for me," objected Tom.

"What do you propose to do then," said Chot impatiently.

"Why not one of us go to the hacienda and get what we want," proposed Tom. "The others can wait here until he gets back."

"We might do that," agreed Chot. "Let's draw lots."

Three leaves of different size were selected, which Chot concealed in his hand, the stem only showing. "The smallest goes," he cried.

"Fleet's elected," announced Chot, after each had selected a stem, and a comparison had been made. "In the meantime, while he is gone, Tom and I can be enlarging the hole."

"In the meantime," said Tom emphatically, "I am going to take it easy."

"What do you want from the ranch?" asked Fleet, who was now mounted on one of the mules and ready to start.

"Shovels, a crow bar or two, and some rope, I should say," suggested Chot.

"And don't forget something to eat," put in Tom.

Fleet started off, while Chot and Tom set to work scooping out more sand and doing what they could to remove the barrier which held the boat a prisoner. Then after a period, finding that they had accomplished all that they could unaided, the boys sat down again for an interval of rest.

"Let's take a look about, and see something of the effects of the storm," proposed Chot.

'Acting upon this suggestion the chums made their way through the woods, and were surprised to observe that the storm's fierce path of destruction was of such meagre limits. Apparently the wind cloud which played such havoc in their immediate vicinity had jumped, if one could so express it, from place to place, furiously devouring where it hit and leaving between, long stretches unscathed.

Their walk proved most interesting, and after

an interval Chot was prompted to look at his watch. He found another hour had passed.

"Fleet ought to be back with help by this time, and he will wonder what has become of us, so let's hurry back," said Tom.

This they did, however they were first to arrive at the point where the boat was held prisoner. Very shortly, however, they were joined by Lieut. Thomas, who had brought with him two or three men and an extra pair of mules. Fleet had delivered his report and now under the expert management of the lieutenant the truck and its burden were soon released.

"It is quite as well that things turned out as they did," said the officer. "I shall send the boat on now, direct to the cave, so that it will not need to go to the ranch at all."

Saddle horses had been sent over for Chot and Tom, who, with the lieutenant, rode back to the ranch. The men who had accompanied the officer now taking up the task of transporting the boat to its destination.

"Fleet did not forget your requisition for a lunch," said the lieutenant, laughing. He was riding beside Tom and handed out a small parcel, the contents of which the recipient was soon contentedly munching.

After a late dinner that night the boys were sufficiently tired to early seek their sleeping quarters. The following morning at breakfast they were informed of the final arrangements for the attack on the bandits' camp, the time for which was set for that very night.

Another visitor arrived during the forenoon at the ranch. It was Major Benson, who had ridden over for a conference and to tell of the work of the bandits in their last raid, some particulars of which had been communicated by Nellie over the wireless.

That morning too, was one of unusual excitement to the boys. From the fort came word that the captain with a band of men was on the way to a rendezvous to the mountains near the entrance to the cave. Lieutenant Thomas left early to assure himself of the delivery of the boat. The program, as learned by the boys, was to man the boat with a complement of soldiers. There was also to go along the sheriff and two aides. An endeavor was to be made to reach the outlaw camp by means of the Lost River route, through the mountains.

"Say, but I am disappointed in the arrange-

ments," said Chot. "I surely hoped to be in at the finish."

"Well, you have done far more than your share in bringing about a prospective end to our troubles," said Mr. Shelton, "and I guess everybody in this vicinity will be most appreciative."

"Attacking an outlaw's camp is a soldier's duty," interrupted the major. "Gad, but I wish I were young again, that I might join in the melee myself."

CHAPTER XXIX

CONCLUSION

ACTING upon a wise suggestion, although protesting against the need of so doing, the boys now took a few hours of rest to make up for time lost the night before and to prepare for any future emergency. It was well they did.

"If you boys want to go part way with me, I am off now for the war," was the laughing remark of Lieutenant Thomas. "I was delegated to look after the horses left by the detachment who go on the river trip, but I got the captain, my brother, to agree to leave a sergeant to act as home guard and take me as a substitute in his place."

"Can't you prevail upon the captain to take us?" asked Chot.

"I doubt it. This is serious business, and the captain would not feel justified in taking any risks."

"Well, let's go along as far as the cave. You may send back for reinforcements," suggested Tom.

After a "five o'clock tea," as Fleet called it, the boys, who had their mounts ready, started with the lieutenant on the ride to the mountain. No incidents occurred on the trip, and they arrived at the entrance to the canyon while the sun was still above the horizon. In a grove of trees quite hidden from sight, they found stationed a considerable troop, a detachment of cavalry. As the time for moving had come a detail of eleven men accompanied the captain and lieutenant up the trail toward the cave.

"We'll at least see the last of you," announced Fleet.

"Well, that's not very encouraging," said the lieutenant laughing. "We hope to come back and to be accompanied too, by such evident results as will justify the trouble we have taken."

The captain explained as they went along the conditions at the outlaw camp. The plateau upon which the camp itself was situated, was undoubtedly on American soil. It was absolutely inaccessible except through a trail from the Mexican side, and through the Lost River. High on a cliff

with a sheer 1,000 feet of nearly perpendicular wall protected them from any other approach.

The Mexicans could easily have put an effective stop to the desperadoes' crimes, but those in authority were doubtless interested in the profits derived from their nefarious work. The American troops could not make the attacks upon Mexican soil, and hence the plans arranged for this night, seemed to be the only ones possible.

The craft which the captain had secured proved to be a sizable whale boat. It had been launched and was found guarded by two sentinels.

"It's time the sheriff and his aides were here," complained the captain in an annoyed tone. "I wonder if he expects the United States government to wait for him?"

"How many will your boat hold?" Tom ventured to inquire.

"Fifteen at the most, we have estimated, and I have included no heavy weights in the troopers selected."

"What will you do if the sheriff's party does not come?" asked the lieutenant.

"That's easy," said Chot, "substitute us."

The captain, however, demurred and showed by his manner more and more his annoyance.

Finally the lieutenant suggested to the captain the idea of letting the boys go merely, as he said, "to care for the boat when the troopers landed in the outlaw camp." This, greatly to the satisfaction of the comrades, was the arrangement finally made.

Loaded pretty well to the gunwales was the whale boat when it started on its darksome mission. But lights and lanterns were carried, which revealed the hidden beauties of the stalactite walls. It was not really so dark as one might expect. Every particle of rock seemed to glitter, to magnify and increase the light. Their progress down the stream proved uneventful. Slowly they drifted along, noiselessly without the use of oars, still making fair progress.

When they came to the point where Chot and Tom had made their landing on the eventful day of the earthquake, the shore was readily made out, also the cavity through which they had made their escape. Soon thereafter the captain determined that they were nearing their destination. All lights were extinguished, absolute silence enjoined.

It was well beyond the middle of the night by the captain's watch when the first glint of a star was made out by the eager adventurers. This must indicate, they determined, the opening to the outside world; doubtless the bandits' camp was near at hand. By the use of two oars, the direction taken by the boat was controlled, and although the night was dark, the sky partly overcast, the landing-place used by the bandits was easily made out and was readily approached.

As arranged, the comrades were to man the boat and hold it with the oars or other means, to the shore. The soldiers, led by their officers, crept slowly toward the bandits' bungalow. This, the boys could see in the dull light. Evidently so safe was the camp considered, no sentinel was on duty.

The boys were told afterwards how the roundup was effected. A man or more was stationed at every window, and when all were in place, the captain's call to surrender rang out on the stillness of the night. Immediately there was wild commotion within. From the many bunks and cots forms rose up, and each saw the glitter of a musket thrust into his face.

"Hands up," was the call, a command no one dared deny.

"Who says so?" grumbled one of the captured ones.

"An officer of the American Army," was the reply.

"Now march out, one at a time," was the next order, given in a clarion voice.

"It's all up, I'm thinking," said someone gruffly.

As each man passed through the door, he was taken in hand, relieved of his weapons and his hands tied behind his back.

"I wish we dared to get closer and see what was going on," said Chot.

"It wouldn't be fair," responded Fleet, "after the captain so graciously permitted us to come. In the army you know, obedience is expected, and we were ordered to stay here."

"I suppose you are right," responded Chot in an aggrieved tone.

"Say," said Tom in a whisper. "What is that moving in the bushes yonder?"

Instantly the eyes of the others were turned in the direction indicated by Tom.

"There is someone trying to escape, that's sure, and he is coming this way."

No further words were spoken, all were intent in observing the movements of the man whom they had detected.

They now made out that there were two, and unobserved as the boys were themselves, they could see that the men were making for the river but directing their steps to a place twenty or more feet beyond the point where lay their boat.

"There is another boat there," whispered Chot.

"They are attempting to escape. We must stop them."

Hardly had he spoken these words when the two men were seen jumping into the little skiff.

"Stop, or I fire," shouted Chot. He had no gun, and he doubted whether the men could see him, but the mere fact that they were discovered prevented further effort to get away, on the part of the detected bandits.

Now was heard the steps of the lieutenant and some of the men running in their direction, and the boys had the satisfaction of learning that the two men who were trying to slip away were none other than the bandit chief Valdez and his outlaw companion Juan.

"Well," said the captain a few moments later, "it was a happy outcome. Not a shot fired, and every rascal rounded-up."

The night's work of course was not finished. The prisoners had to be carried a few at a time back through the Lost River and turned over to the sheriff. This individual had, however, lost any chance of glory through his dilatoriness and fail-

ure to arrive at the appointed place on time. But the comrades naturally had no complaint to make on that score, but they forego adding to the sheriff's discomfort by thanking him, as they felt disposed to do, for being late.

And so our story ends, and until we meet, if it be our good fortune, upon the Great Divide, we say good-bye.

THE END.

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